

DUK-H00512-5-GS5863

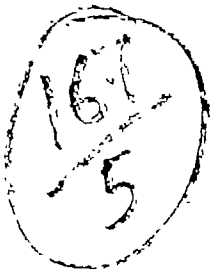
NEW SERIES

VOL. V NO. I

1969-70

*Suppl.*

**BULLETIN**  
**OF**  
**THE DEPARTMENT**  
**OF**  
**ENGLISH**



CALCUTTA UNIVERSITY

BULLETIN  
OF  
THE DEPARTMENT  
OF  
ENGLISH



NEW SERIES

VOL. V : NO. I

1969-70

EDITED BY  
AMALENDU BOSE



CALCUTTA UNIVERSITY

EDITED BY AMALENDU ROSE AND PUBLISHED  
BY SIBENDRANATH KANJILAL, SUPERINTENDENT  
CALCUTTA UNIVERSITY PRESS.

GS 5863

THE BULLETIN of the Department of English, Calcutta University.  
*Annual Subscription*: INLAND: Rs. 5.00 (inclusive of Postage)  
FOREIGN: 13s. (inclusive of Postage) *Single Copy*: INLAND: Rs. 2.50  
(exclusive of Postage) FOREIGN: 6s. 6d. (exclusive of Postage).

PRINTED BY SURAJIT C. DAS, AT GENERAL PRINTERS  
AND PUBLISHERS PRIVATE LIMITED, AT THEIR WORKS  
ABINAS PRESS, 119 DHARAMTALA STREET, CALCUTTA-13.



## CONTENTS

---

THE RAGE OF OEDIPUS : A STUDY OF THE OEDIPUS TYRANNOS ...	1
Amal Bhattacharji	
THE DATING AND UNCONSCIOUS MEANING OF MILTON'S SONNET 'ON HIS BLINDNESS' ... ..	20
Sunil Kanti Sen	
COLERIDGE'S 'A LETTER TO SARAH HUTCHINSON' ... ..	23
A. K. Chanda	
TOWARDS A DISTINCTION BETWEEN FANCY AND IMAGINATION ...	41
S. K. Das	
YEATS FROM A PERSONAL ANGLE ... ..	62
Amalendu Bose	

## OUR CONTRIBUTORS

AMAL BHATTACHARJI Professor and Head of the department of English, Presidency College, Calcutta.

SUNIL KANTI SEN whose D. Phil. (Calcutta) dissertation was on Donne and the Metaphysical Tradition, is on the department of the Humanities, Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur.

ASOKE KUMAR CHANDA, educated all through in England, an M.A. (Cantab.), is now on the postgraduate department of English, Mysore University.

SISIR KUMAR DAS M.A., D. Phil. (Calcutta), Head of the department of English, Asutosh College and a part-time lecturer in the postgraduate department of English of the University.

AMALENDU BOSE, Professor and Head of the department of English, Calcutta University.

# THE RAGE OF OEDIPUS :

## A STUDY OF THE *OEDIPUS TYRANNOS*

---

AMAL BHATTACHARJI

It is comforting to be able to explain the 'insoluble conflict'<sup>1</sup> of tragedy in terms of some pseudo-mythical or psychological or ethical formula, for we thereby prove that the world order is not irrational and that human suffering, however intolerable or meaningless it may seem, is, in the final understanding, justifiable. Oedipus's suffering would be intolerable unless we could refer it to a guilt or at least a slip<sup>2</sup> on his part. Thus while Kitto attributes it to his violation of *dikē*, other critics have found an adequate cause in his rashness and intemperate rage.

But the fall of Oedipus is in the mythology, and Sophokles was not free to alter or modify it in any radical way.<sup>3</sup> Nor does he set out to explain it or account for it by relating it to a universal order that he may have believed in. Nothing in the text of the play enables us to arrive at any formulation of the dramatist's personal belief. Tragic action in its progress undoubtedly follows a certain pattern, but if this were supplied by the ethical or cosmogonic faith of the playwright himself, the broad and serious human significance of tragedy would decline into a tedious statement of a merely personal philosophy. The dramatic form pattern should project a more deep-rooted and complex pattern 'communally available, acceptable and intelligible, although not necessarily consciously in all its terms. The rage of Oedipus, an important trait of his character, is not to be considered ethically or psychologically as in naturalistic drama but is to be traced to a complex pattern of interrelated ideas and feelings, which we cannot analyse in detail—as we can in Shakespeare's tragedies to a deepening of our understanding of his plays. Even then, however, what sketchy indications survive in the literature from Homer to our dramatist enable us to arrive at some tentative conclusions, to be used for further exploration. Oedipus's rage, we shall discover, is not a psychological invention of Sophokles; the trait results from the previous long development of the myth, according to the very logic of such development. Oedipus exists in mythology before he exists in tragedy; the rage is connected with this previous existence and is to be, at least partially, accounted for in terms of this existence.

Greek tragedy has nothing to do with 'heroes' in the conventional modern sense,<sup>4</sup> as Aristotle has nothing to do with them. In most of

his surviving plays, however, Sophokles—alone among the Greek dramatists—is engaged with the hero in the mythical sense,<sup>5</sup> a post-Homeric phenomenon, denoting a person who, after a life time of exceptional achievement and suffering, passes into immortal chthonic existence and remains a source of both blessing and dread<sup>6</sup> to the people—not necessarily his own—among whom he has his grave. Not quite a god but godlike in power and immortality, he exacts regular sacrifice and worship.<sup>7</sup> In such a person rage and intemperate passion<sup>8</sup> would not call for ethical judgment or psychological analysis, for it would form the very mode, the only possible mode, of his *mythic* existence and action. It is this mythic existence that the *Oedipus Tyrannos* presents.

But in an age in which mythology evokes living response while the conditions in which it was born and has developed, have changed in major ways; in which, further, it receives a complex articulation in another medium than ritual, namely tragedy; in such an age mythology is bound to receive a reinterpretation which is no less significant than the story's primitive orientation, and which it derives from the contemporary milieu. Unfortunately, this also cannot be investigated in any detail in regard to Greek drama. It is to be noted however that until Shakespeare's *Lear*, there was not to be another such presentation of an essential tragic situation; the confrontation of man with his destiny through the futile attempts that he makes in order to construct a destiny, a scheme of things for himself, not realizing the ineluctable condition of ignorance in which his life places him, which the progress of a little time brings to naught.

Oedipus is fated to suffer, and as he says of himself, he is to die no ordinary death. Like Herakles,<sup>9</sup> another analogue of his, he brings down the most horrible calamity upon himself at the moment of his greatest triumph. Rage climaxing into daimonic possession intervenes between the latter and the former and is followed by a deflation which is as wretched as the triumph was magnificent: abasement, self-pity, self-commiseration, a condition in which the once triumphant hero has to lean physically and spiritually on those whom he had once liberated and protected. This last occurs most pronouncedly in the *Tyrannos*. Although in the other extant Sophoklean plays the pattern does not show itself with quite such clarity of progress but in rather more involuted ways, its plastic force is visible nevertheless, for example, in the shifting relations between Philoktetes and Neoptolemos.<sup>10</sup>

Tragedy as a living tradition, is more than a literary genre. It is an organic part of that interconnected complex of institutions, social, juridical and religious, which embodies the total culture of a community, and it expresses and fulfils the same basic inner needs at a different level.

It has therefore a polyvalent function and the attempt to define this in a single formula has only resulted in pedantic speculation, than which nothing could be remoter from the inexhaustible impact of a Sophoklean or a Shakespearean tragedy. Certainly tragedy is not to be simply identified with the ritual pattern it incorporates,<sup>11</sup> because at the same time it has incorporated vital elements from a multitude of other sources, among them literary and philosophic. The task of interpretation is to isolate and analyse these elements without—this is extremely important—for a moment losing sight of the play's text. The text, not the story. The purpose of the present essay is to analyse and interpret in some detail one feature of the *mythos* of the tragedy, the protagonist's rage, and to relate it even if sketchily to a complex social, religious, mythological, emotional and intellectual background.<sup>12</sup>

## II

The pre-classical Oedipus myth is only exiguously and elusively available to us. Even then we can distinguish some developing features in the hero<sup>13</sup> which, in the classical age, either through the purely literary elaboration of the myth, whose details we are no longer in a position to trace, or through a radical reinterpretation of the myth in the altered religious situation<sup>14</sup>—this indeed is more likely to have happened—were so completely transformed as to turn the purely human epic figure into one symbolizing human destiny in an age which came to see it in terms of an 'insoluble conflict'. We can ignore one (4.378) of the only two allusions to the myth in the *Iliad*, but the other (23.679) establishes, as early as this, that association of Oedipus with violent death which is a conspicuous feature of the myth, if we accept Jebb's interpretation of *dedoupotos* as 'plainly referring to a violent death in fight, or at the hand of an assassin'. In the *Odyssey* 11.271ff, although Epikastē (Iocastē) is plainly the more important figure, the basic situation of the myth, with the motives of ignorance, parricide, incest, exposure by the gods, the woman's self-slaughter thereafter, the son's punishment by the gods and by the Erinyes (the mother's in this case), emerges into clean existence. The passage also contains, however 'embryonically, that sense of entrapment in destiny'<sup>15</sup> which is one of the impressions of the *OT*. The meaning of Homer's lines need not be laboured. But it is easy to see that all the above motives waited only for a different religious background from Homer's to be invested with a sense of enlarged and generalized terror and doom. We may perhaps detect some such sense in Hesiod, *Theog.* 326, in which the Sphinx is mentioned as the progeny of Echidna<sup>16</sup> and is also connected with the Theban plague.



We are told by Athenaeus<sup>17</sup> that Sophokles closely followed the epic cycle in his tragedies. The fragmentary material from the *Thebaid* introduces the curse motive<sup>18</sup> and also that of Oedipus's rage—both for the first time—and takes over the Erinyes from Homer. The father raging against and cursing his sons because sacred family relationships and obligations are outraged—this situation required only to be fertilized by the genius of the tragedians and by the much deeper ethical and religious sense<sup>19</sup> of their time to be 'universalized' for all time.

Although the data are so limited, it is possible to perceive a certain process of living elaboration of the myth<sup>20</sup> in the Epic age—the age of Homer, the Epic Cycle and Hesiod. Living, at least, in the sense, that each of the documents examined furnishes some feature, some detail or new outline, all of which, in the succeeding age of 'guilt culture',<sup>21</sup> could be resolved and integrated in an articulate tragic pattern. The new Sophoklean motivation—the all-important one—was that of the miasma,<sup>22</sup> ritual pollution, of which we find not a trace in Homer, whose Oedipus continues to rule over the Kadmeians even after the revelation and while he is tormented by the gods and by his mother's Erinyes. Nor is there any trace in Hesiod, none in the cyclic fragments. The miasma—this must be dwelt upon here, to show the vital difference between the Epic and the Tragic ages—brings in its train universal pestilence, sterility and death; turns the great King into the misery-stricken pharmakos<sup>23</sup> who must be destroyed limb by limb or who must at least, symbolically, with his own hands, destroy his sight; who must first, in ignorance of the situation, curse himself and at the end supplicate that the curse be carried out. In the Exangelos' speech we have that association of defilement of blood and Katharmos which comes back, through the symbolism of blood, in *Macbeth*. The miasma, the figure of the pharmakos, the sparagmos<sup>24</sup> and lastly, in the *OC*, the epiphany; along with these, the fear, the tormenting sense of contingency,<sup>25</sup> the unbearable alternation of despair, hope and despair again, the sense of near-suffocation with which the protagonists and the Chorus become aware of the tightening noose (physically symbolized in Iocastē's self-hanging): of these, of course, we find not a trace in the sources that we can document, not even in Sophokles's immediate predecessor Aischylos. We shall surely exaggerate if we maintain that it was Sophokles's genius alone that achieved this transformation, surely he owed much to the crisis of consciousness in contemporary Athens of which the speculations of a Protagoras were another symptom. Briefly, Sophoklean tragedy is a response to a situation of widening gap between the ultimate reality of man's existence, and man's understanding of it. Traditionally formulated in the *nomoi*, this reality

is given a new, individual and sacrilegious formulation by the hero of the *O. T.* as Tyche. <sup>24</sup>

Of this more later. But it is easy to see that in such a situation as this the rage of Oedipus is in a sense related to the tragedy's metaphysic, reflecting the unrealized unconscious inner emptiness of a man desperately struggling to, and imagining that he does, understand the scheme of his existence. The King's rage against Teiresias and Kreōn and his daimonic possession in the last scene, the recurrent use of words like *oida*, *tuphlos*, etc., the cyclic structure of the tragedy from beginning to end, in which episodes recall and repeat each other at different levels of import—all this must be seen in the context of the insoluble dilemma of imagined understanding and actual ignorance which motivates the tragic tension without a moment's relaxation, even at the end, and which is articulated in the so-called Sophoklean irony.

The rage of Oedipus springs from the warped and distorted consciousness of a man who faces inexorable disintegration and refuses to accept it even when it is all over. The ejection of the Prophet and of Kreōn from the polis, which Oedipus tries to effect in his rage, is only a substitute for and anticipation of his own ejection for which he vainly prays at the end. Nothing that he desires is to be fulfilled, not even his curse.

The lyric poets do not mention Oedipus, but he appears briefly in Pindar, who, in *Ol* 2.42, for the first time invests the Oedipus myth with a certain cosmic dimension. Oedipus, 'the doomed son', *hulos morismos*, 'fulfilled' the 'anciently given word of Pytho' by slaying his father, and the 'swift-footed' Erinyes took revenge by killing his warlike sons. The structure looks forward to Aischylos: the curse works itself out through the generations. A providential scheme of things is suggested, in which the sense of the continuous passage of time releases the spectators from the constriction of the present moment. The myth receives a conscious religious orientation in Pindar, and this is deepened in Aischylos and Sophokles.

The fragment from the *Oedipus*, the second in the Aischylean trilogy on Thebes, has been dealt with adequately by Jebb. *ScT* 772-91 has a brief but striking sketch of Oedipus which almost anticipates the Sophoklean figure: a figure admired by gods and men at his first appearance, he tore out his two eyes and most bitterly cursed his two sons in *mainomena kradia*, frenzied heart, when he came to know of his marriage, and now the Erinyes are working out the harsh fulfilment of fate. Curse, frenzy and the Erinyes repeat themselves here as the myth's permanent features and are adopted by Sophokles in his two Oedipus plays. Something he must have owed, also, to the figure of Oedipus in the trilogy's second

play, which is undoubtedly recalled by '*mainomena kratia*' and *pikroglossous aras* of *ScT*.

### III

An earlier paradigm must be considered here. The tragedians' debt to Homer has to be reinterpreted, for it extends only to the mythological material of the plays (and even that not always extensively), but the interpretation of it derived entirely from what has been called the sixth century religious revolution in Greece. The differences between the Homeric and the classical religious outlooks are today obvious. Nevertheless, since the recitations of Homer played such an important part in the Panathenaic festivals and otherwise formed such an extremely significant element in Athenian culture, we cannot doubt that they were an extremely important element in the 'Inherited Conglomerate'<sup>17</sup> available to the people. Tragedy also owed a more specific debt to the Homeric tradition. The raging hero of tragedy has his prototype in the *Iliad*. The quarrel between Oedipus and Teiresias offers a striking parallel to the Achilles-Agamemnon scene in the *II*. A prophet and an offended god are involved in both. In the play, one of the kings is replaced by Teiresias, slave of Apollo, with a majesty surpassing the King's, but the progress of the quarrel follows the same course. Oedipus is at first patient, like Achilles, and is then overcome by sudden and ungovernable fury, which is matched with equal fury on the part of Teiresias; the same thing happens in the epic. In both cases the issue is one that admits of no compromise and one of them has to win outright. Oedipus rages, challenges, reviles and brags like a Homeric hero, and pits the superiority of his own wisdom against the Prophet's. Of course there is a radical difference of import. The epic hero's rage is purely secular, whilst that of the tragic hero, directed as it is against a preordained order of things in which he is already the polluted criminal, has a much deeper connotation. No prize is involved here, it is not a question of defending one's honour, so vital in a 'shame culture'.<sup>18</sup> Oedipus is fighting against the imputation of guilt and pollution. The presentation, however, is similar. Tragic rage, which differs so radically in purport from epic rage, is projected in a similar image.

In the *kommos* the humiliated Oedipus weeps before all, recounting his *pathemata* (with the Chorus grimly assenting). The import of this will be considered in detail later. We have to note here that the *metabole* from rage to self-pity and helplessness occurs also in Homer, who makes Achilles pray tearfully to Thetis in sentimental self-pity after the quarrel (*II*, 1).

This comes to be a part of the tragic pattern. In the case of Sophoclean drama, at least, this may have something to do with the ritual concept of the *pharmakos* and its translation in terms of human tragedy. Oedipus in his vain supplications to Kreōn at the end of the play is the *pharmakos* in the ritual, facing and submitting to outrage and humiliation. There is no intention whatsoever to introduce gratuitously a mood of sentimental tenderness to succeed the heroic mood, as in purely literary tragedy.

The hero's rage begins in the first episode, in the Teiresias scene,<sup>19</sup> and continues with two intermissions till the last scene, in which it assumes an explicitly daimonic intensity. This intensification occurs, it is to be noted, after the sudden and shattering illumination introduced by the Therapious revelations and the remote and immediate past, the present, and the future arrange themselves in a hideous coherence. The wave of rage begins soon after the pursuit of truth has been launched (first episode) and is exhausted in a reaction of self-abasement and tenderness after the discovery. Stages of the passion connect themselves with the stages of the unfolding of the truth; the climax of both arrives explosively in the same situation. Thus the rage belongs to the play's inner form, to the action, and is not a reprehensible personality trait.

The play's present moment is surrounded by two concentric circles: the immediate past and the remote past. Laios' murder belongs to the former and the hero's involvement in it makes him ritually guilty in the present. Similarly, his marriage with Iocastē has made him ritually guilty, in view of the remote and unknown past, in which he is the Queen's son. For Oedipus, however, his entire past, *as he knows it*, is free from guilt and pollution, the killing of the old man and the marriage with the Queen being both entirely natural in the circumstances. This—the contradiction between human knowledge and the god's knowledge—is the 'insoluble conflict' underlying the play, insoluble except in terms of the primordial myth itself<sup>20</sup>. At another level the same insolubility lies in the contradiction between ritual guilt and secular and moral innocence.

Essence and actuality are in conflict from the beginning. The prologue presents Oedipus as the honoured, accepted and all-sufficient king and deliverer of Thebes, an image cherished equally by the King himself and his people. The parodos calls upon him to be true to himself and by expurgating the plague once more to deliver the city the disease itself is called upon as the healer and the plague is nearly forgotten in the contemplation of the coming deliverer's glory.

Whether Oedipus is personally wise and intelligent is not the real issue at all. The real issue is that this image of the King, believed in by

himself as unquestioningly as by his people, is a purely illusory apprehension. Its validity is time-bound and it begins to disintegrate at the first challenge. The same fact of illusion has affected even the human relations in the play, for those who are actually *philoî* (Oedipus, Laios, Iocastê) regard themselves as strangers and behave towards one another as such, breeding incalculable havoc and miasma. The miasmal violations of kinship upon which the play's action turns arise out of an inescapable and inevitable failure to *know* and *see*: hence the recurrent use of *oida* and connected words in every situation. The King, like others in the play, is only aware of the circles of the present and of parts alone of the immediate past, to the second of which belongs the slaying of Laios. The identity of the murderer and of Oedipus is unknown, although Oedipus knows he has slain an old man and all Thebes that Laios was killed. And the further identity of Oedipus—son of Laios and Iocastê—belongs to the remote past, of which Iocastê knows this much only that she had once a son who is now dead. Thus it is all an entanglement of partial knowledge. Each lives in a world of fragments of knowledge and unrealized or partially realized identity is the common situation of Oedipus, Iocastê and the city of Thebes, and all are engulfed by the *anagnōrisis* and the *peripeteia*. The function of Teiresias at the play's beginning and that of the Thera-pion at the end is to restore the cosmos by demonstrating the unsuspected coherence among the fragments. The rage with which the Prophet's message is received by the King, the pain and bewilderment of the Chorus and the impious scepticism of Iocastê—all this points up the "insoluble conflict"—insoluble except in disaster—between essence and human perception which motivates the tragic praxis.

The plague with which the action begins is a symbol of the crisis inherent in the situation and it is also the divine chastisement of the ritual guilt. As the people see it, it is the king's responsibility to deliver them, for he is *andrōn de prōton en te symphorais biou/kritnontes en te daimonōn sunallagais* (II 34-5), judging (you) to be the first of men both in the common events of life and in divine interventions. The king also unequivocally accepts his responsibility. At the start of the action, then, we see the illusion fully established, based on Oedipus' perception of the present moment alone and on the ignorance of the king's complete identity. This identity, since it belongs to a past of which only fragments are known, is bound to remain unknown without divine communication, so essentially limited and therefore misleading is human knowledge. The knowledge of which Oedipus boasts (396ff) is a personal construction, at total variance with reality. The plague disturbs him deeply and he suffers more on account of it than the citizens do (II 60ff); but he imagines that only certain rituals

have to be carried out against the murderer and the will of the god will be realized. The curse is uttered more or less as a formula, to be transformed, in the course of the action, into a terrible symbol.

Teiresias's<sup>91</sup> role is purely passive in relation to the affairs of present existence. He is the interpreter of past, present and future and it is through his assistance that man gets a coherent knowledge of his existence. He is at first extremely unwilling to deliver his message, but when he does so, the King, instead of being released from his clouded, time-bound perception, becomes more hopelessly imprisoned in it and distorts the role of the mere interpreter, messenger, into that of an active agent, a chief manipulator of events. The very first outburst of Oedipus' rage shows that this is rooted in and reflects the ignorance which is the foundation of his existence in the play. The authority of the Prophet is a major issue in the action and it continues to trouble and occupy all the people until the Therapion's arrival; Oedipus and Iokastē both dismiss it and the Chorus do not know how to react to it: first they are disturbed and shaken, for they cannot believe the accusation, then they identify the Prophet's words with the *nomoi*, then, in the last stasimon, in their jubilation they also dismiss it, although tacitly.

In the course of the first episode Oedipus implicates Teiresias in an imaginary conspiracy against Laios; then, after the Prophet has spoken, against himself, in collusion with Kreon. He proceeds to brag that his own knowledge is superior to the Prophet's and to call him a *dolios agurtes*, a cheat. Rage leads Oedipus to commit mounting sacrilege, and when he calls the Prophet a cheat he completely repudiates the *nomoi*, on which the Prophet's authority is based. Teiresias opposes his sacril rage to the King's impious rage, and his reminder that he is Apollo's slave and neither the King's nor Kreon's has particular relevance in this context.

The situation takes another turn when Teiresias goes on to make further revelations, not connected with the Delphic message about Oedipus' kinship with Laios and Iokastē. They are not heeded by anybody although he repeats them thrice (II 366, 411, 447), twice in enigmatic language and the last time elaborately and in plain words.

Although they do not heed this part of the message, the Chorus feel deep dismay at this unexpected turn of events and are "shaken fearfully" by the Prophet's words (I 483). Zeus and Apollo are indeed *xunetoi*, sagacious, *ta broton/eidotes*, and know the things of mortals (I 499), but how can they be completely sure that the Prophet has greater knowledge than themselves? And--this distressing problem is implied in what they say--if they cannot, then how is the gods' will and wisdom to be transmitted to mortals? In this unexpressed dilemma they decide to retain

their faith in the King, for every one saw his *sophia* when he saved the city from the Sphinx (I 511), and they will wait for the word of the Prophet to be proved correct before they will believe the accusation (I 503).

This is indeed a great change from the situation in the prologue. The Chorus' role of suppliants is over and they increasingly assume a position first of equality with and then at last of superiority to the King.

A remarkable feature of the situation is that neither the King nor the Chorus respond to the larger part of Teiresias' message, in which Oedipus is denounced as parricide and incestuous husband of his mother. The only comments of Oedipus are that his words are intolerable (I 429) and that they are entirely enigmatic and dark (I 439). And the Chorus do not even make a comment. This failure to comprehend must have a situational relevance: it shows that the polluted Theban community is so cut off from the heavenly powers that it can receive no communication from them. The plague is one indication of this situation and this failure another. The identification of Laios' murderer with the King, from which they recoil, they can comprehend even though they do not accept it, since it bears on the immediately present moment alone. The murderer's further identification is beyond them, because, being connected with a much remoter past, it surpasses their pollution—circumscribed capacity for understanding.

The Oedipus-Kreon scene repeats the preceding scene on a different key. But Kreon's reasoned and patient pleas are to be contrasted with the sacral rage of the Prophet—no psychological contrast but one of status. Once more it is Oedipus' wisdom and the scheme of things he has constructed (and seemingly identified with the will of the gods) that is challenged. *Phronein* and equivalent words are recurrently used in the scene and link it up thematically with the play's issue, that of knowledge and ignorance. A sort of mania seems to possess the King as he, without any evidence whatsoever, dooms Kreon to death. Even when Iokastē's intervention saves the man, he cannot lay aside his rage and hate. The Chorus sympathize with Kreon and tacitly approve when he accuses the King of injustice.

This ignorance-rage-sacrilege-injustice-impiety syndrome of Oedipus is to be found in other Sophoklean figures, for example in Kreon in the *Antigone*. *Sophrosyne* is<sup>32</sup> not their quality nor do they ever strive after it. All experience the bitterness and anguish of existence to the full, with rage and impatience. A quality of compassion redeems the misery in many Euripidean plays, but this alleviation is denied by Sophokles, who presents the human tragedy at its starkest.

Injustice has shaken the old confidence of the Chorus in the King, as the Nomos-Hubris stasimon shows, and their place is now taken by

Iokaste. The King-people unity, which has been a conspicuous feature of the situation, is destroyed once for all, and the father-image of Oedipus in relation to his subjects does not return.

The validity of oracular prophecy is the subject of the Oedipus-Iokastē scene. This underlying theme in the first episode is made explicit in the second, the longest, episode in the play, in which we reach the middle point of the action. So long it was one particular Prophet and his wisdom that were in question. Now two prophecies (both emanating from Delphoi) are compared and a generalization arrived at by the Queen. The institution of prophecy is repudiated (l 709). Her own experience supports her attitude for the way Laios was killed is a decisive proof of the vanity of prophecy. •The god himself will declare if he wants anything (l 725) and prophets only deceive and mislead us.

This is a completely anarchic statement and subverts the cognitive and normative foundations of the community. The Nomos-Hubris stasimon closes the first part of the action, and presents the judgment of the Chorus, responsible Theban seniors, upon what has happened and been said so far. The immortal existence of *theos*, *ourania aithēr* and Olympos are all associated with *hupsipodes nomoi*, which are never forgotten and never grow old. And to these belongs the sanctity of Delphoi, which is reasserted in the most forceful language. The whole issue is brought to a head in the stasimon's concluding lines, with the reference to *Laiou' palaiphata thespatu* which 'already men are annulling'. As a result anarchy is raising its head: *errei de ta theia*, the god-ordained things are decaying (ll 906 ff). Before this, in the same stasimon, *hubris* has been condemned in no uncertain terms as breeder of tyranny and pride opposed to reverence for gods and fear of Justice (l 883).<sup>33</sup>

All this is an oblique denunciation of Oedipus' rage and sacrilege and injustice and also of Iokastē's impiety in repudiating the authority of Delphoi.<sup>34</sup> The Chorus lift themselves out of the comparatively shadowy role of the foregoing episode and show forth as an independent entity—they are the upholders of the community's holiest traditions and are deeply disturbed by the outrage that is now offered to them. The King is however troubled at the same time. Have I been laying myself under a dread curse and *did not know it* (l 745)? Can the Prophet see after all? (l 747) The sight-knowledge cluster of words has appeared again, just at the middle point of the action, and indicates a crucial moment; and both King and Queen tremble at the sense of ominous doom (l 749). Oedipus' anxious questionings reveal an enigma again—was Laios killed by one man only or by a number?—and an interpreter is once again sent for. Oedipus repeats the curse he had pronounced against the murderer. If he should



be the murderer, *tie echthrodaimou mallon ōn genoit' anēr*, what mortal would be more hated of the gods (I 816) ?

Reassuring words are spoken by Iokastē, who has her own experience to prove that divination is worthless. The Therapion is still sent for however and Oedipus remains doubtful. After this follows the Nomos-Hubris stasimon, in which the Chorus pronounce their verdict on the process of events and take stock as it were.

Events have advanced in a continuous line so far. The prologue shows the superiority of the King accepted unquestioningly by his people ; wise beyond mortal knowledge, he delivered the city once and will surely deliver it once again.<sup>98</sup> But this position is challenged by the Prophet, messenger of Loxias, in the first episode and the Chorus are shaken and are afraid, Oedipus turns into a raging tyrant in the course of the first episode. This change, which seems to escape the Chorus for the moment, is pronounced and settled in the second episode, the longest in the play, when Oedipus is about to sentence Kreōn to death on a purely fanciful charge of treason. Saved by the Queen's intervention, Kreōn accuses the King of injustice and the Chorus tacitly agree. Oedipus and Iokastē then compare notes on the validity of divination and as they do so dread seizes the King lest the Prophet should be right and he be the victim of his own curse. There follows Iokastē's definitive repudiation of divination, justified, as she imagines, by her own experience, and the Queen's misapprehension is added to the King's. Oedipus' downfall from wise and provident king to raging, sacrilegious and unjust tyrant is anticipated in the first episode although unmarked by the Chorus ; it is confirmed and established in the second and connects itself with the discarding of oracles and their substitution by chance by Iokastē. The second stasimon takes fearful note of the situation and exposes its significance : anarchy impends. Nomoi and human apprehension are completely at variance and hubris is the result ; the inevitable consequences will surely follow. The progress in events lies in the establishment of the complete polarization between *nomoi* and Iokastē's *tychē* and the only possible resolution lies in a disaster.

The next episode marks a retardation in the sense that this disaster is delayed for everybody except for Iokastē by the message of the man from Corinth, which fills everybody else with hallucinatory and frenzied joy. Oedipus is delivered from the long dread that has haunted him that will kill his father and marry his mother and in this joy the question whether he has murdered Laios is forgotten. All ambiguity seems to be lifted from his existence and even if it should be revealed that he is of lowly origin he is prepared to welcome it, for he is the child of Tychē. For Iokastē also all ambiguity has been lifted and she rushes away to destroy herself after

trying in vain to make Oedipus desist from pursuing his enquiries further. King and people return to each other in a jubilant celebration after Iokastē removes herself. Oedipus is happy—he is son of Tychē; the Chorus are happy—he is the son of some god. Oedipus can now wholeheartedly assent to Iokastē's impious theology that the oracles of the gods are naught and to her immoral ethic that it is best to live at random since chance rules all (I 978-9). Deep irony lies in the fact that the truth of the oracles should be proved to the hills first of all to the very person (Iokastē) who had declared their nullity most unequivocally. Deep irony also pervades the happiness of the King and the Chorus and its very intensity, following immediately on Iokastē's rushing away in desperate horror is a sign of its hallucinatory quality. Protagonist and Chorus are now banded together in complete isolation from gods and their *nomoi*, and although the Chorus piously address an invocation to Phoibos (I 1097), he is the very god whose ancient word concerning the house of Laios (I 906) they have set at naught and to whom therefore they commit sacrilege.<sup>36</sup> The irony of this cannot have been unintended, especially in view of the fact that the third stasimon is a precise contradiction of the second, in which the Delphic prophecies are accepted as part of the *nomoi* and their repudiation denounced as anarchy and sacrilege.

In a sense, therefore, we return in the third episode to the situation of the prologue, but this time the King and his people are bound in a common tie of sacrilege; Oedipus has declared that he is the child of Tychē and the Chorus mythologize and theologize this, rejoicing. The plague and the Hubris-Nomos stasimon are quite forgotten. How unreal the situation is, is immediately exposed. The fourth episode, following immediately, settles all the issues once for all and the Therapion, who distantly reenacts the role of Teiresias in his possession of the secret and in his reluctance to speak out until he evokes the King's violent fury, brings iron confirmation to all that Teiresias had revealed. The conclusion of the fourth episode and the melancholy fourth stasimon are a preparation for the tremendous exodos that follows. All is clear now, Oedipus cries out (I 1182). After such illumination it is no longer necessary that he should look on light: *Ō phos, teleutaton se prosblepsaimi nun* (I 1184).

Oedipus' next words are translated by Jebb as "found accursed in birth, accursed in wedlock, accursed in the shedding of blood". This is an enlargement of the sense of *edei* and *chrēn*, which directly suggest no more than "ought to have", "was necessary" but Jebb's version brings out forcibly the King's intense anguish. "Accursed"—this is one of the play's recurrent ideas, perhaps the most recurrent; the play's action is launched with a curse, whose victim is the man who utters it and this is the complete

identity of Oedipus. This the Prophet had foretold and left to be confirmed by the Therapion, and the confirmation to be sealed by the King's own lips.

The involuted irony of the situation from beginning to end once again underlines the gulf between reality and man's understanding of it, and the consequent impossibility of right action in life's decisive moments. The fourth stasimon draws conclusions that are entirely logical: men's generations are *isa mēden zōsas*, as if not living at all (I 1187). Happiness—life's supreme issue to the Greeks—is an illusion, a seeming merely, *hoson dokein*, and even the seeming is impermanent, *doxanta apoklinai*. *Dokein*, seem: this is to be related to the recurrent idea of sight and knowledge in the play, as *apoklinai* to the tower image that follows soon after. *Dokein* is opposed to *horan*, see. *Panta horon chronos*, all-seeing time, has found him out *akonta*, in his despite, and *dikazei ton agamon gamon*,<sup>37</sup> judges the marriage which is no marriage (II 1212-14). And they wish never to have seen him, *eidomān* (I 1216)—again the image of seeing. Words expressing this idea are used so often in the play and with so many associations—including, here, the idea of judging—that it receives the force of an image whose sense is connected with the play's theme and with the climactic action in it, Oedipus' self-blinding.

The exodos falls into three parts: the narration of the Exangelos, the kommos, the Oedipus-Kreōn encounter. The presentation of the self-blinding entirely through the Exangelos' narration has always been taken for granted, on the assumption that violent action is always offstage in Greek drama, but this is by no means always so. Murders take place offstage, but we can hear the shouts and screams of the murderer and the victim as in the *Agamemnōn* and the *Choēphoroi*, and the corpses are on display soon after the killing. In the *Aias* the hero kills himself on the stage. In the *Elektra*, as in Aischylos' corresponding play, we can hear if not see the killing. Besides, the Exangelos' narrates not only the self-destruction of Iokastē and Oedipus' self-blinding but also how he rages before and after the act, and much of this might have been directly presented. In the *Trachiniai* the rage of Herakles takes place on the stage. The reason for the completely indirect presentation of the *pathos* of Oedipus must lie in the nature of it. The only parallel to this is his apotheosis in the *oc*, only there no bystanders are present (Theseus is a participator in the sacred drama).

The reason lies in the exceptional quality of the *kaka*, the *agos*, that are involved, which make them unfit to be looked upon.<sup>38</sup> It is not so much the parricide—although that is monstrous enough, it is expiable—as the incest which places the King beyond the pale of human communication

( the parricide is not unmentionable, the incest is : the word itself is *anosi' oude rēta*, not to be uttered, ( I 1288 ), until, <sup>39</sup> after the blood that the King has so copiously shed he has been partially purified. This interpretation gives a thematic relevance to the stressed account of the bloodshed ( II 1276 ff ) in the Exangelos' narration.

Another reason is that for the moment Oedipus has ceased to be human. Possessed by supernatural force, he is not fit to be seen or heard and he is not to appear until the 'fit' has completely expurgated itself.

The Exangelos' three-phased account of the deeds of Oedipus—evils which Ister or Phasis will not wash away, done not unwillingly but of purpose and choice ( II 1230-31 ) and which will be soon exposed to light ( we remember Oedipus' invocation of light a few moments ago )—deals first with the demoniac rage and possession, then with the kathartic and sacrificial act of self-blinding, and finally with the kenosis. <sup>40</sup> Even thereafter, he is not fit to be seen or to show himself, as Kreōn remind the Chorus in bitter words ( II 1224 ff ): this gives us an idea of the enormity of the pollution and makes explicit the reason for the whole *pathos* taking place offstage and unheard. Oedipus is possessed of violent physical strength in his rage as he screams and cries out sometimes in fury, sometimes in deep misery, rushing about and asking for a sword in order to kill the wife who was no wife ( I 1256 ). He is *lussōn*, frenzied, and is guided by some *daimōn* ( I 1258 ) as with a dread shriek and as though led by somebody, he leaps out and wrenches out the bolts from their sockets. The supernatural possession is made clear enough and it is equally clear that the shoutings and the physical strength are regarded as unnatural. After the discovery of the dead body, *deina d'ēn t' anthen d'horan*, what followed was dreadful to see ( I 1267 ). The recurrence of *deinon* and parallel words is noticeable. Tearing the golden brooches from her garment—substitute for the sword for which he had been asking—he stabs at his eyes not once but repeatedly ( I 1275 ), turning the sacrificial act not on Iokastē but on his eyes. The sight image which dominates the play in various modes of presentation from the first episode is now, through the violent physical horror of the deed, transformed into a symbol of the illusion and deception in which the King has existed : that is the meaning of the words he says ( II 1271 ff ) as he commits the sacrificial outrage, repeating his last words at the end of the fourth episode and enlarging and magnifying them. A dark shower of blood comes down at each blow and drenches his beard ( II 1276 ff ), but even now there is no respite from the suffering, for he is shouting for some one to open the door and show him in all his unmentionable pollution to the Kadmeians ( II 1287 ff ). The fit however has passed and the kenosis has begun :

the supernatural strength has deserted him and there is none to lead him : *rōmes de mentoi kai proēgētou tinos/deitai* ( I 1292 ). *Deitai* : lacks. Now begins the process of the destitution of Oedipus, at the end of which he is to be deprived of everything and even his last wish is to be denied. The exodos shows, stage by stage, the process of the destitution. *To garnosēma meizon ē pherein*, the torment is more than he can bear, and the spectacle is one which even he who loathes it must pity ( II 1292, 1296 ), the Exangelos says feelingly at the end, underlining the fear and pity of the *pathemata* and resuming the generalization of the situation, which is first seen in the fourth stasimon and in continued in the Kommos and, thereafter, as a paradigm of the 'human situation'.

We notice Oedipus' changed relationship with the Chorus after his reappearance. The father image of the King has disintegrated and in his pitiful deflation he submits to the sympathetic but ruthless judgment of the Theban Elders, who do not encourage his self-commiseration but assent in dry comments to everything he says about his wretchedness. This mood of self-commiseration which lasts till almost the end, finding further outlet in his pathetic concern for his daughters, in which he keeps clinging to a remnant of the old father image, is in vivid contrast to the display of superiority with which the King's figure has been associated so far, and to the rage, the defiance and the arrogance with which, rather than accept Teiresias' interpretation of the Delphic message, he held on to his own construction of the scheme of things and finally idealized himself as the child of Tyche. Now, although he does not mention the Prophet, he summarizes the Prophet's judgment on himself : *kataratotatos, theois/echthrotatos brotōn*, most cursed and most hated by the gods among men ( I 1345 ). The act of self-blinding was indeed *hekon, autocheir*, done by his own hand, although Apollo brought these miseries to pass. When the Chorus suggest that it would have been better to die than live a blind man ( I 1367 ), Oedipus brings the kommos to an end in a long and spirited speech of self-defence<sup>41</sup>—this is his last self-assertion—in which, as once before to Iokastē, he recounts his whole life but now adding the interpretation that it was all seeming : *kallos kakōn hupoulon*, fair to see but with festering sores beneath. The notion of *dokein* in the fourth stasimon is recalled. He does not say he is evil : *nun gar kakos t'ōn k'ak kokōn heuriskomai* ( I 1397 ), he is of evil birth and is found evil and so it is essential that he should hide himself from light. Equally, that nobody should see him. *Exo me pou/kaloupsat'* ( I 1410 ), hide me away from the land, he says, slay me or cast me into the sea, *entha mēpot' elsopse' thseti*, where you shall never see me more. His own blindness is not enough. His *kaka* are so monstrous that the sight of them is a ritual infection. But

immediately after this brief return to the heroic mood he resumes his self-commiserating role : touch me without fear of pollution, he says, for I alone can bear my *kaka* and no other mortal ( I 1415 ).

The scene of his meeting with his daughters is affecting and also falls into the pattern of majesty followed by abjectness that we have been studying. O tekna <sup>42</sup> ( I 1480 ) echoes the opening phrase of the play in which he addresses all the citizens of Thebes as his children, whose saviour and guardian he has been and will be. Now, after a brief and mournful meeting, his daughters are taken away from him in spite of his entreaty ( I 1522 ), which only evokes a harsh rebuke from Kreōn. He is then led away ; this is our last sight of the King. This is a *metabole* which is even more pitiful and awesome than death, this reduction to utter emptiness.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. "All tragedy depends on an insoluble conflict. As soon as harmony is obtained or becomes a possibility, tragedy vanishes." Goethe, quoted in A. Lesky, *Greek Tragedy*, p. 8. London, 1965.

2. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy*, p. 143. London, 1961.

3. Cp. *Poet.* 1453 b 22 ff.

4. The question of the "hero" is discussed convincingly in J. Jones, *On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy*, I, i. London, 1963.

5. E. Rohde, *Psyche*, tr. W. B. Hillis, Vol. I, pp. 117 ff. New York, 1966.

6. M. Eliade, *Patterns of Comparative Religion*, p. 419. London, 1958

7. J. Pollard, *Seers, Shrines and Sirens*, pp. 119-20. London, 1965.

8. Rage is not the hero's invariable quality but is extremely important if we regard Herakles as the typical hero.

9. The characters and careers of Herakles and Oedipus have some points in common. Both are liable to violent fits of rage. Both are wanderers and deliverers, both suffer excessively and commit pollution through ignorance. Euripides' *Mainomenos* projects the mythologic figure of Herakles and is comparable in many respects to Sophokles' treatment of Oedipus in the two plays.

10. Like Oedipus, Philoktetes also offended the god in ignorance. In his case the position of the outcast is symbolized in the wound and in his physical and geographical isolation. The violent pain of the wound which overcomes him from time to time after which he is deprived of all strength, the fury and rage that come upon him when he discovers the betrayal, his pathetic trust in Neoptolemos and his redemption at the end follow the Oedipus pattern. His distrust and hostility for the young man after he realizes Odysseus' treachery makes his position more pathetic.

11. The reaction against the conservative Murray-Harrison theory of tragedy is largely justifiable (see Else : *Origin and Early Form of Greek Tragedy*. Cambridge, Mass, 1965) but no other view can account for the relevance of many major episodes and recurrent episodes in tragedy. As literary devices these would be in many cases, extraneous, superfluous and superficial and sometimes merely horrible (like the blinding of Gloucester in *King Lear* and Oedipus' self-blinding. Besides it is undeniable that the

greatest tragedies project basic character types and situation patterns whose extraordinary power is derived from their source in forgotten or half-forgotten rituals and myths whose memory they activate.

12. The chief feature of the whole situation was that religion was now permeated with a feeling of awe verging on superstitious dread which is completely absent in Homer and largely in Hesiod. Hence those features in Aeschylean drama which Page and Lloyd-Jones find obscurantist.

When Sophokles wrote, radical questionings had been already introduced by Sophists which were tending to subvert for many minds the traditional foundations of communal existence formulated in Pindar and Aeschylus.

13. Roberts' *Oedipus* has not been available to the present writer.

14. The 6th century 'religious revolution' was the fundamental factor in this situation, but in Sophokles (see note above) this is complicated by the rise and increasing prominence of the anthropocentric view propagated by the Sophists.

15. This is the recurrent impression of Sophoklean tragedy and is underlined by the Lemnian isolation of Philoktetes and also by the self-slaughter of Aias and of Iokaste. The former play anticipates the last scene of Kafka's *The Trial*.

16. The Echidna ('Snake') reference at least suggests the association of the Theban saga with the cult of the chthonic and with the various and contradictory associations of the snake in cult, ritual and myth.

17. VII. 277B.

18. Significance of curses : Crawley, Hastings, *ERE* iv. 367 ff.

19. Compared, that is to say, with the Epic age. But this is already disintegrating in Sophokles, as we can see in the theology and ethic of Iokaste and the moral confusion of the Chorus reflected in the divergence between the third and the fourth stasima.

20. With regard to the development of mythology in this context, see Raglan, "Myth and Ritual" in *Myth, a Symposium*, ed. Sebeok. Bloomington, 1955.

21. E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Ch. ii. Berkeley, 1951 (An invaluable book for the study of Greek tragedy).

22. Dodds, *op cit* p. 35.

23. On the Scapegoat in Classical Greece, see Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (Abridged edn.) pp. 579-80. On the connection between the Scapegoat and the Dying God, see p. 576. Vestige of the latter concept can be traced in Oedipus. See also J. Harrison, *Prolegomena to Greek Religion*, p. 106. London, 1922.

24. J. Harrison, *Themis*, p. 342. London, 1963. (In Murray's "Excursus on the Ritual Forms Preserved in Greek Tragedy")

25. On the sense of contingency as one of the determining motives in religion, see T. F. Odea, *The Sociology of Religion*, p. 5, New Jersey, 1966.

26. Tyche appears more or less as a figurehead in Hesiod (*Theog* 360) and in the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* (420), but apparently in a major role in Archlochos (fr 16 Bergk) and in Pindar, who numbered her among the Moirai (Paus. 7.26.8). Oedipus however uses Tyche in opposition to nomoi (*OT* 1080), perhaps for the first time in such a connotation.

27. G. Murray, *Greek Studies*, 66 ff.

28. Dodds, *op cit*, p. 17.

29. Most critics have ignored the first episode of the play. Lesky, one of the exceptions, rightly says about this episode, "It is the most brilliant feature of the construction of the play, the most dramatically effective in the literature of the world, that the whole truth is unequivocally expressed at the beginning of the play" (*op cit*, p. 111).

It should be noted however that neither the expression nor its reception is "unequivocal". The mode of either is discussed in detail later.

30. That is, it is resolved only through divine intervention, and this is what happens in *OC*. In the *Philoctetes* divine intervention is essential to break the deadlock.

31. Rohde, *op cit* Vol. II, p. 290, explains the difference of the "new mantike" from the Homeric. Probably Teiresias is also possessed, like Oedipus, but by sacral rage. Oedipus adds to his sacrilege by denouncing the Prophet. Iokaste's guilt in repudiating not only oracles but their fountain itself—Delphoi—is even greater.

32. W. Jaeger, *Paidela* (tr Highet), Vol. I, pp 277 ff, Oxford, 1954, deals at length with the *sophrosyne* of Sophokles' characters. The word is never used by Sophokles and the parallel words *sophroneo* and *sophronos* are used in the ordinary connotation without any connection with *arete*, as Jaeger suggests. As he uses it, the idea appears to differ little from the Stoic attitude formulated in M. Aurelius' *Meditations*.

33. The Pindaric-Archylean quality of this is to be noted.

34. Kitto (*op cit*, p. 167) maintains that the Chorus speak only in "general terms". Hubris does not apply to Oedipus because "he is not ambitious". But the stasimon's relevance to the context as a whole—to the entire second episode—is unmistakable. It is a passionate reassertion of tradition against its subversion by Iokaste's suggestion that they should 'live at random'.

35. This is the mythical hero's typical role and proves his overwhelming superiority to ordinary mortals and his access to divine wisdom. "You are first among mortals," the Priest says to him, who "without schooling" but "by a god's aid, as they say and believe", saved the city from the Sphinx (*II* 31, 37-8).

36. We must note that Laios' murder is completely forgotten. The implicit dismissal of prophecy naturally includes dismissal of the message brought by Kreon in the first episode.

37. *Agamos gamos* contains an obvious antithetic reference to *hieros gamos*.

38. How monstrous it was considered to be is sufficiently indicated as early as the *Iliad*, *II* 456 ff.

39. On the pollution, compare Plato *Rep.* 571c.. Iokaste's light hearted reference to it (*II* 980-3) anticipates the Sophist Hippias' argument that the incest taboo was conventional and had nothing divine or instinctive about it since all people did not observe it. (Xen. *Mem.* 4.4.20)

40. T.H.Gaster, *Thespis*, p. 23. New York, 1961.

41. When Oedipus says, "Had I sight I do not know with what eyes I could have looked on my father when I came to Hades or on my wretched mother", he means it literally and not figuratively and reveals a concern for life after death not to be found in the Epic age. The words spoken by Othello after the discovery of Iago's treachery are strikingly similar:

When we shall meet at compt  
That look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven,  
And fiends will snatch at it.

(V.ii. 276-8).

42. This is also the first word of *OC*.



## THE DATING AND UNCONSCIOUS MEANING OF MILTON'S SONNET 'ON BLINDNESS'

---

SUNIL KANTI SEN

MILTON's sonnet beginning 'When I consider how my light is spent' has been differently dated. While Grierson and Hanford date it to 1655, Tillyard is inclined to believe on grounds of internal evidence that the sonnet was composed much earlier, almost immediately after Milton became totally blind. The poet was partially blind when, urged by the council, he wrote in 1651 his *First Defence*, a turgid and scurrilous tract in defence of the regicides. In 1652 he completely lost his eyesight. Tillyard argues that the tone of rebellious despair in the octave and the 'unusual lowliness' of the sestet would justify placing the poem in the early days of blindness. By 1655 Milton had outgrown his first shock and despair and recovered something of his early hauteur and his lust for doing something worthwhile and great. In his *Second Defence* written in 1654 there is a direct reference to his blindness, and the tone is different. In an impassioned passage he scornfully rejects the insinuation that his affliction is a punishment sent by God, and affirms that his blindness has strengthened and purified his soul, made him fitter for the great task ordained for him. 'In proportion as I am weak, I shall be invincibly strong; and in proportion as I am blind I shall more clearly see. O, that I may thus be perfected by feebleness, and irradiated by obscurity.' This is echoed in his Hymn to Light in Book III, *Paradise Lost*. It is inconceivable that the high-spirited and bellicose pamphleteer who wrote the *Second Defence* in 1654 should a year later write a personal poem in which he found comfort in the un-Miltonic philosophy of 'stand and wait'. Internal evidence rules out 1655 as the possible date of composition.

The dating of the poem has a direct relevance to its meaning. If we accept Grierson's dating (1655), the meaning of the poem will have to be reconstructed on the following lines:

- (1) in 1655 Milton had a second attack of despondency;
- (2) he went through the agony over again and found his recovery through a meek submission to the will of God;
- (3) he totally abandoned the hope so vigorously expressed in the *Second Defence* that a compensatory inward light had fortified his soul.

A close scrutiny of this framework of meaning will lead to certain

conclusions which falsify our response to this sonnet. Since it is hardly probable that Milton was subject to periodic fits of depression—he was made of sterner stuff—it would be logically fair to conclude that the sense of despair so movingly expressed in the quatrains is a simulated attitude—and the startlingly evocative ‘in this dark world and wide’ is just a stylistic device, a characteristic Miltonic collocation. This interpretation will necessarily tone down the meaning of Milton’s self-abasement. The voice of patience is, accordingly, a laboured exercise in piety, and the abandonment of all hope a contrived gesture meant to heighten the tone of piety. Any such interpretation is not true to our total response to this deceptively simple and un-Miltonic poem which Tillyard has found ‘extremely difficult and strange’. Tillyard’s dating does not solve the ‘difficulty’ of the poem, but it will make sense if we start with the reasonable assumption that it is an authentic record of Milton’s first response to his blindness.

On the conscious level, the sonnet is a moving record of Milton’s spiritual conflict, a sense of despondency deepening into a rebellious spirit of doubt—in the first part of the sonnet there is more than a hint that for a brief while he was assailed by doubts; it is a record of his final submission to the will of God. The lament of the first quatrain is reminiscent of the despair of Samson shorn of his locks, but at the ‘turn’ of the sonnet there is a lowering of the key and the voice of patience has an ironic overtone of unconscious meaning. The sestet, it should be noted, offers no promise of any ‘inward celestial light’. It is a plea for stoical courage and for unquestioning acceptance of the ways of God. The unconscious meaning of the poem goes much deeper than a dialogue between despair and faith. It involves Milton’s long-cherished faith in his exalted mission as a poet to compose a poem which ‘posterity should not willingly let die’. His despair was the direct outcome of an exaggerated conviction, inherited from the Renaissance, that he was destined to do something in a big way. For him poetry was not an end in itself; it was a means to public good. Hence his blindness was a public calamity. This is the argument of the first quatrain. Behind this temptation to doubt the justice of God lurks a disturbing suspicion that perhaps he had overrated the value of his mission as a teacher of men. And a fear that perhaps his blindness was a punishment for the sin of pride. This is not openly stated in the poem, but ‘doubt’ alone does not adequately explain the tone of self-abasement which is unmistakable in the poem.

...His state

Is Kingly : thousands at his bidding speed

And post’o’er land and ocean without rest :

GS 5863

## COLERIDGE'S 'A LETTER TO SARA HUTCHINSON'

---

A. K. CHANDA

COLERIDGE'S Verse-Letter to Sara Hutchinson is the original version of the famous "Dejection : An Ode".<sup>•</sup> It was unearthed by Ernest de Selincourt and first published in 1937.<sup>1</sup> Although the achievement of the letter is unequal, justice has not been done, I feel, to its unique organisation, to the quality of some of its verse, nor to the passionate subtlety of the self-analysis, the analysis of a tragic state of mind. To my knowledge Humphrey House is the only critic who has tried to show in what ways the letter is superior to the Ode.<sup>2</sup> Apart from its intrinsic merits as a poem (many of which, naturally, it shares with the published version, the Ode) the letter provides a fascinating contrast to Wordsworth's "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality" which he had started before Coleridge completed his letter. This contrast helps us to focus on the radical differences in poetic technique, attitude to life and nature, temperament and state of emotional and creative health of the two poets

The Verse-Letter which is 340 lines long compared to the Ode's 139, was completed on the evening of 4th April, 1802, at Keswick in the Lake District. Coleridge who had for some time been in love with Sara Hutchinson was then at the nadir of his marital unhappiness. Although by all accounts his wife was a good woman in many ways, she lacked sensibility. Coleridge bemoans this several times in his note books :

.. by an habitual absence of reality in her affections I have had an hundred instances that the being loved or the not being loved is a thing indifferent ; but the notion of not being loved—that wounds her pride deeply.<sup>3</sup>

On the same day he wrote :

(she) is uncommonly cold in her feelings of animal love.

The very next entry is the following :

The spring with the little tiny cone of loose sand ever rising and sinking at the bottom, but its surface without a wrinkle. W. W. M. H. D. W. S. H.<sup>4</sup>

The significance of this beautiful image ("the continual change of the matter, the perpetual sameness of the form"), and of the omission of

Coleridge's own initials has been pointed out by Miss Coburn in her notes to the text of the note books :

...when Coleridge wished to note an experience in common with his friends, his own [initials] were usually included...But in this case he is not part of the spring, the cone of sand, and the unruffled surface ; that is the Dove Cottage Circle.—He, alas, lives in the angry, spasmodic painful companionship of Greta Hall. The contrast is sharp and far from unconscious.

Apart from his lack of an equivalent to the Wordsworth circle Coleridge must have been acutely aware of the difference between the health of his poetic powers and that of Wordsworth's. In a note book entry seven months previously he had compared Wordsworth to "*fagus exaltata sylvatica*"<sup>5</sup>—a towering beech-tree. In another entry a year after "Dejection : An Ode" he had written :

O Sara ..why for years have I not enjoyed...one genuine delight that rings sharp to the beat of the finger....But have said to the poetic feeling when it has awakened in the heart—Go :—and come tomorrow.<sup>6</sup>

Some critics noting the conscious echoes in the Verse-Letter of Wordsworth's Immortality Ode deduce that Wordsworth also is talking about the loss of his poetic powers. Apart from the evidence in the Ode itself, the letter testifies that Coleridge at least thought otherwise.

The poem opens (the first two stanzas of both the letter and "Dejection") with Coleridge gazing at a tranquil evening sky in spring. The new moon with the old moon in her lap presages a storm. We find here a cluster of symbols which are widespread in Coleridge's poetry : the wind, the lute and the moon with its phantom light. The lute not only in Coleridge's poetry but in romantic poetry generally is an analogue of the poet's mind and heart.<sup>7</sup> It records the feelings of the poet and the pitch of his creative activity as the wind blows through its strings. In this poem the dull sobbing sound makes us *feel* the poet's emotional state before he defines it a little later as a "grief without a pang, void, dark and drear." The wind is both a symbolic and literal wind. It symbolises the creative breeze, of inspiration which blows through the poet's mind. In the 'Prelude' Wordsworth brings together the literal and symbolic winds :

For I, methought, while the sweet breath of Heaven  
Was blowing on my body, felt within  
A corresponding mild creative breeze.<sup>8</sup>

In this poem Coleridge refers to the evening wind "*which moulds yon clouds in lazy flakes*" (italics mine), but only "rakes" or scrapes the

strings of the lute, not plucks them nor plays on them. But the wind is not just symbolic. Its symbolic function naturally derives from the Romantic's living experience of winds. Coleridge wrote in one of his letters that he watched a storm "with a total feeling worshipping the power and 'eternal link' of energy."<sup>9</sup> (*italics mine*). The literal wind as stimulant is referred to by Coleridge in 15-16 :

O Sará that the gust even now were swelling,  
And the slant night shower driving loud and fast.

The third symbol is the moon which is invariably associated in Coleridge's writing with the life of the imagination, as well as of tender, warm feelings. Here surprisingly enough it is made to contrast with the poet's emotional and imaginative sterility.

In stanza two, after describing his numbing grief, Coleridge turns back to his natural surroundings and describes the exquisite particulars of the scene. The delightful description of the larch "which pushes out in tassels green, its bundled leaflets" (omitted in "Dejection") and the thin clouds which "in flakes and bars . give away their motion to the stars" shows powers of close observation. What he said of Dorothy Wordsworth could equally well be applied to him :

Her eye was watchful in minutest observation—.

This was a power that Wordsworth lacked. As Lionel Trilling remarks so admirably in his essay on the Immortality Ode :

His finest passages are moral, emotional, subjective ; whatever visual intensity they have come from his response to the object, not from his close observation of it.<sup>10</sup>

As we shall see Coleridge's powers of accurate observation also extend to "the goings-on of his own mind and of the powers that [are] in that mind."<sup>11</sup>

But what is surprising is the poet's un-Wordsworthian response to this natural beauty. Although Coleridge sees the serene beauty of the sky it does not induce in him a corresponding mood : "I see them all so excellently fair ! I feel how beautiful they are." Not only we, but the poet himself registers some surprise at this unexpected reaction : "And still I gaze—and with how blank an eye !" The poignancy of Coleridge's inability to respond to nature and thereby shake off his lathergic grief is intensified by the very fineness of the description.

Apart from the beauty of nature which we are made to see *and* feel, we are also made aware of the unostentatious creative activity of spring which throws into relief the poet's death in life. The breeze moulds the clouds, the buds sprout leaves, even the moon seems to grow in its splendid clear lake of blue, and the clouds seem to impart their motion to the stars.

Later in the poem (L. 168) he refers to himself (somewhat self-piteously) as "a withered branch upon a blossoming tree," where the blossoming tree refers to the Wordsworth circle. This was a theme which Coleridge returned to 13 years later with an even greater sense of desolation in "Work without Hope" :

All nature seems at work. Slugs leave their lair—  
The bees are stirring—birds are on the wing—  
And winter slumbering in the open air,  
And I, the while, the sole unbusy thing,  
Nor honey make, nor pair, nor build, nor sing.

Here it might not be out of place to mention the resemblance between Coleridge's poetry and George Herbert's. Both dealt poignantly in similar imagery and style with the theme of the thwarting of their creative impulse. Moreover, since Coleridge was acquainted with Herbert's poetry and admired it for its "pure, manly, unaffected diction," the possibility that Coleridge was influenced by Herbert cannot be ruled out. Compare the following two passages from Herbert and stanza two from the Verse-Letter and the above stanza from "Work without Hope" :

All things are busie ; only I  
Neither bring honey with the bees,  
Nor flower to make that, nor the husbandrie  
To water these. (Employment)

I read and sigh and wish I were a tree ;  
For sure then I should grow  
To fruit or shade ; at least some bird would trust  
Her household to me, and I should be just.

(Affliction)

One important difference between the two poets is that unlike Coleridge ("Wherefore, O wherefore should I wish to be/A withered branch upon a blossoming tree") Herbert never betrays the slightest self-pity. Note how the simple dignity of "and I shall be just" braces the whole stanza.

In stanza three of the letter, Coleridge expresses in those two famous resonant lines the deductions he makes from his failure to attune himself to nature ;

I may not hope from outward forms to win  
The passion and the life whose fountains are within.

Without the responding life from within the poet, nature is to all appearances dead, consisting of "lifeless shapes, around, below, above." These two lines mark a radical, although not unexpected, reversal in Coleridge's whole attitude to nature, an attitude which he had expressed

in many of the poems written in the 1790's both before and during his collaboration with Wordsworth. Wordsworth and he firmly believed in the doctrine of nature's healing power: they were both nature-worshippers. In "Tintern Abbey" Wordsworth had talked about the "tranquil restoration" produced in his heart by the "beauteous forms" of nature. In "This lime-tree bower my prison" Coleridge invokes with great confidence nature's powers of arousing the human heart:

Henceforth I shall know  
That nature never deserts the wise and pure ;  
• No plot so narrow, be but nature there,  
No waste too vacant, but may well employ  
Each faculty of sense, and keep the heart  
Awake to love and beauty !...

His aim had been "in poetry to elevate the imagination and set affections in right tune by the beauty of the inanimate impregnated, as with a living soul, by the presence of life."<sup>11</sup> Since on the occasion of writing this poem nature has failed him, he deduces the necessity of a passion and a life from within.

At the end of stanza three Coleridge realises that even the thought of Sara gazing at the sky only stirs him feebly. Yet paradoxically after nineteen lines of musing on a childhood vision in which he used to gaze at the sky and think with delight of "a maiden's quiet eyes" communing with the selfsame sky, a vision he seems to have lost, he suddenly discovers that he had spoken with "rash despair" and "ere I was aware/ The weight was somewhat lifted from my breast." It is, therefore, the affectionate thought of Sara merging with that of "a maiden's quiet eyes" which stimulates a renewal of his emotional life.

In stanza four, he returns more hopefully to the thought of Sara in connection with nature. First he associates Sara with stock-doves (an image of love, warmth and tenderness) in a "weather fended wood", but realises that he would prefer to see her seated upon the God-built seat of Camomile", listening for his sake to "the bee-hive murmuring near." This perhaps might stimulate him to creative activity.

Having "mixed memory and desire" in this stanza he can explain a little later with gladness:

Ah ! remembrances fair that so revive  
The heart and fill it with a living power.

He has now regained sufficient emotional vigour to respond to nature, and find in the sky a prayer from Sara. Although this thought is embarrassingly sentimental what is important is that Coleridge has demonstrated by precisely recording the train of his thought and the emotional

changes he undergoes how true it is that the source of passion and life lies not in nature but in his heart. In fact "the stimulus and [main] governing principle of the whole train of association"<sup>13</sup> which comprises the poem is his love for Sara. This train of association in turn intensifies his love. In a note-book passage Coleridge wrote in connection with Sara "of the thousand thoughts...which never fail instantly to awake into vividder flame the forever and ever feeling of you."<sup>14</sup>

In stanza seven (L.99-110), we find that nature is now living enough to trigger off by association memories of one particular Keswick evening :

It was as calm as this, that happy night  
 When Mary, thou and I, together were,  
 The low decaying fire our only light,  
 And listened to the stillness of the air !  
 O that affectionate and blameless maid,  
 Dear Mary ! on her lap my head she lay'd—  
 Her hand was on my brow,  
 Even as my own is now ;  
 And on my cheek I felt thy eye-lash play.  
 Such joy I had that I may truly say,  
 My spirit was awe-stricken with the excess  
 And trance-like depth of its brief happiness.

This verse is obviously unsatisfactory except for the last two lines. It may, however, be rewarding to ask why. Leaving aside the mawkish Platonic love, and the narcissistic "Her hand was on my brow/Even as my own is now", the central fault, (characteristic of much of Coleridge's writing), is the failure to externalise an intensely felt personal experience. This verse manifests merely what Coleridge himself would have called the working of the primary imagination, "the living power and the prime agent of all human perception", in *seeing* the low decaying fire and *listening* to the stillness of the air and of the fancy in selecting and bringing together certain images. There is little sign of the working of the "essentially vital" secondary imagination "which struggles to idealise and unify." Let us take a stanza from his poem "The Day-Dream" with the same fire-light setting and note the difference.

The shadows dance upon the wall,  
 By the still dancing fire-flames made ;  
 And now they slumber moveless all,  
 And now they melt to one deep shade.  
 But not from me shall this mild darkness steal thee :  
 I dream thee with my eyes, and at my heart  
 I feel thee !



Here the dancing rhythm which is reproduced by the repetition of dancing, and by the rhythm of the second line, the precise description of the shadows changing from dancing shadows into moveless ones which finally melt into the darkness, and even the feeble emotional gesture of the last two lines, which are at least an attempt to make the evocation serve the theme of the poem, they are all signs that the secondary imagination is struggling to transform and unify the perceptions of the primary imagination.

In stanzas ten and eleven, Coleridge broaches the main theme of the Verse-letter, "the contrast between Sara Hutchinson's 'joyous' membership of the Wordsworth group with its permanency of gladness and affection and Coleridge's own separation from it and lack of an equivalent."<sup>15</sup> He writes that if his hope that Mary and Sara and the Wordsworths will live together in "One...dear abiding home" is realised then he will be triumphantly happy: "I too will crown me with a coronal." This is a conscious echo of a line from the following passage in Wordsworth's Immortality Ode.

Ye, blessed creatures, I have heard the call  
Ye to each other make ; I see  
The heaven laugh with you in your jubilee,  
My heart is at your festival,  
My head hath its coronal.  
The fulness of your bliss, I feel—  
I feel it all.

Apart from the intended contrast which, as I have mentioned, is the main theme of the letter, it is significant that Coleridge's happiness has to do with relationships and the well-being of people, Wordsworth's with participation in the joys of nature.

In stanza twelve, Coleridge expresses the sorrow he would feel if Sara fell ill and he wasn't there to comfort her :

But O to mourn for thee, and to forsake  
All power, all hope of giving comfort to thee—  
To know that thou art weak and worn with pain,  
And not to hear thee, Sara ! not to view thee—  
Not sit beside thy bed,  
Not press thy aching head,  
Not bring thee health again—  
At least to hope, to try—  
By this voice, which thou lov'st, and by this eye—  
Nay, wherefore did I let it haunt my mind  
The dark distressful dream !  
I turn from it, and listen to the wind... .

These lines reveal another common aspect of Coleridge's poetry. They threaten with every line to topple over into sentimentality, but in fact never do, so that the total effect is moving. First, what is important is the movement of the whole paragraph, not the individual lines. We are carried along by a powerful rhythm which enacts the surges of feeling experienced by Coleridge's imaginative sympathy. Secondly the insistent repetition of the crucial words "thee" and "not" helps to reproduce the anguish of helplessness. Thirdly the controlled change in verse rhythm and length of lines modulates the emotion, concentrates it and then relaxes it slightly in the last line to prevent the dramatic reversal in the next stanza from sounding melodramatic. And finally this dramatic breaking-off, by diverting Coleridge's attention to reality, and curbing the rising emotions averts both sentimentality and hysteria.

In stanza thirteen, therefore, ( stanza 7 of "Dejection" ) Coleridge turns from his anguish to the scream of agony of the storm plucking on the strings of the lute. He evokes by concrete images ( "Jagged rock". "Mountain pond", "blasted tree" ) the violent and desolate nature of the wind which corresponds to his own emotional state. In this stanza Coleridge also explores the nature of the wind, as creative wind. First it is the "mad lutanist" making "worse than wintry song" in spring amidst the blossoms and buds. Secondly it is an "actor, perfect in all tragic sounds"; and thirdly it is the "mighty poet, even to frenzy bold". the lutanist, actor and poet are, of course, Coleridge himself while he is responding to the storm; the wintry song is his song, and the wind poems with their themes of "the rushing of an host in rout" and of "groans from men with smarting wounds" are possible Coleridge poems. Moreover Coleridge contrasts his own potentially tumultuous creative powers and possible preoccupation with themes of violence with Wordsworth's gentler creative powers applied in "tender lay ( s )" to such touching themes as that of a child lost from home and crying for his mother. In the lines about the "mad lutanist" there is involved the wish that he, Coleridge, will not introduce with his "worse than wintry songs on the 'peeping flowers...blossoms ( and ) buds' of Wordsworth's spring-like creativeness." <sup>16</sup>

As I have pointed out, the stimulus and main governing principle of the poem is Coleridge's affection for Sara. This affection triggers off associations which in turn intensify the affection and generate other strong emotions such as fear for Sara's health and regret at his helplessness. But there is another governing principle which interacts with the first one : this is the wind. At the beginning of stanza thirteen, Coleridge has turned to the wind which we are told "long has raved unnoticed". This means

that the gradual change in the weather and the gradual renewal of emotional vigour in the poet culminating in his anguish at Sara's imagined illness have run parallel. Now since as we have already noticed this gradual renewal of emotional life makes Coleridge increasingly responsive to nature, it is likely that the rising wind is not only a symbol of the rising emotion in the poet, but also a force acting on the poet, helping to arouse his emotions. This in turn renders the poet more receptive. The relationship can best be stated in Coleridge's own words: "We receive but what we give". We must not forget that the wind is the creative wind stimulating Coleridge in his task of self-analysis. In fact the emotional impact of the wind and its stimulation of the creative faculties are inseparable for Coleridge. This theory may seem far-fetched. After all, although the change in weather and the change in mood have run more or less parallel, where is the evidence for any interaction? The poet never seems to be conscious of the wind until stanza thirteen—"it long has raved unnoticed". Perhaps this is where the importance Coleridge attached to the unconscious in life and art provides an answer. In one of his notebooks he wrote: "Man exists herein to himself and God alone—yea in how much only to God—How much lies *below* his consciousness". About the role of the unconscious in creative activity he said: "There is in genius itself an unconscious activity; nay, that is the genius in the man of genius".<sup>17</sup> I would, therefore, state, albeit tentatively, that the interaction between the wind and the poet up to stanza twelve is at an unconscious level. When we come to the second half of the poem, however, there is no doubt that the great paean to joy and the penetrating and stirring self analysis (compared to the quieter heart-searching of the first half) are stimulated and sustained by the creative wind whose fierceness is reproduced in the rhythm and imagery of stanza thirteen. Coleridge's insight is deepened and his creative powers aroused, this time by his conscious response to the wind, by his exploration of its creativeness, as lutanist, actor and poet. It is important to note, however, that Coleridge is not conscious of the wind as a governing force in the poem.

At the end of stanza thirteen Coleridge expresses the hope that the tempest will be "but a mountain birth." Since a mountain birth is something arid and sterile he hopes, presumably, that the subjects of the wind, which are all violent and destructive, will not affect Sara. Here Coleridge has rather inconsistently shifted the emphasis from the creative powers of the wind to the themes of the wind poems. The tone of prayer in this stanza:

O breathe she softly in her gentle sleep!  
Cover her, gentle sleep! with wings of healing  
And be this tempest, but a mountain birth.

and the protective attitude he adopts reminds one strongly of his "Frost at Midnight." But whereas in that poem Coleridge had advocated for the happiness for his child a life exposed to the beneficent powers of nature, in this verse-letter Coleridge realises—if I may anticipate a little—that the root of happiness is to be found in mutual love, the source of all joy.

At the beginning of stanza fourteen, Coleridge introduces the important theme of joy. He regrets that he has lost that deep joy which—and this is important—is not a joy which is cowed by the vicissitudes of life, but a joy which takes such things as sorrow and wrongs in its stride. But now owing to this loss of joy he cannot withstand sorrows :

...Ill tidings bow me down to earth,  
Nor care I that they rob me of my mirth,  
But Oh ! each visitation  
Suspends what nature gave me at my birth  
My shaping spirit of imagination !

That these ill tidings or visitations rob him of his mirth is not he says the main thing. Here Coleridge makes a fine distinction between mirth or cheerfulness and joy. It is possible to live a life of mirth but without joy, and vice-versa. An entry in his note-books addressed to Sara helps us to understand this point :

Soother of absence. Days and weeks and months pass on, and now a year ; and the sun, the sea, the breeze has its influence on me, and good and sensible men—and I feel a pleasure upon me and I am to the outward view of all cheerful, and have myself no distinct consciousness of the contrary ; for I use my faculties, not indeed as once, but yet freely...But O Sara ! I am never happy, never deeply gladdened. I know not, I have forgotten, what the joy is of which the heart is full as of a deep and quiet fountain overflowing insensibly, or the gladness of joy, when the fountain overflows ebullient.<sup>18</sup>

(Note the very fine distinction between the tranquil power of joy always felt on the pulse and the exalting experience of joy.)

Coleridge's main regret then is not the absence of mirth, but the loss of his birth-right—his "shaping spirit of imagination"—occasioned by the absence of joy in his life. For Coleridge man is a whole—his creative powers are inseparable from his vital emotions.

In the second half of this stanza and in stanzas fifteen and sixteen, Coleridge analyses the reasons for his loss of joy :

I speak not now of those habitual ills  
That wear out life, when two unequal minds

Meet in one house and two discordant wills—  
 This leaves me, where it finds,  
 Past cure and past complaint—a fate austere  
 Too fix'd and hopeless to partake of fear.

Stanza 15 : I complain

Not that I mourn—O friends, most dear ! most true !  
 Methinks to weep with you  
 Were better far than to rejoice alone—  
 But that my coarse domestic life has known  
 No habits of heart-nursing sympathy

Stanza 16 : No griefs, but such as dull and deaden me,

No mutual enjoyments of its own,  
 No hopes of its own vintage. None, O ! none—  
 Whence when I mourned for you, my heart might borrow  
 Fair forms and living motions for its sorrow.  
 For not to think of what I needs must feel,  
 But to be still and patient all I can ;  
 And happily by abstruse research to steal  
 From my own nature all the natural man—  
 This was my sole resource, my wisest plan !  
 And that which suits a part, infects the whole  
 And now is almost grown the temper of my soul.

What has driven out joy from his life is not the "clash of unequal minds" and "discordant wills" in his domestic life, but the absence of "habits of heart-nursing sympathy", of mutual love. This married life lacks "mutual enjoyments" and "hopes of its own vintage" i.e., hopes of anything fine and productive from his relationship with his wife. Even his griefs are dull and deadening like the grief he describes at the beginning of the poem, whereas his sorrow for Sara and the Wordsworths is living and moving because there does exist between them a warm and tender love, the source of all joy. As an anodyne against the stifling unimpassioned griefs of his "coarse domestic life" he resorts to "abstruse-research." By this means he hopes not only to turn his mind away from griefs he cannot help feeling, but also to steal from his own nature the natural man, i.e., try by intellectual abstraction to become sufficiently desiccated not even to feel his unhappiness. (In a letter to Southey he explains that he took to "long and exceedingly severe metaphysical investigations" and gave up poetry-writing partly because of his "private applications which rendered any subjects immediately connected with feeling a source of pain and disquiet to me."<sup>19</sup>) But he realises that this stratagem against grief has boomeranged and infected the whole of his mental and emotional

life. Ironically, therefore, in trying to escape the very pain which had paralysed his shaping spirit of imagination, he takes a measure which in stifling his emotional life in turn undermines his creative powers.

This section with its sad and penetrating self-analysis constitutes the core of the poem. We have returned to the unexplained grief of the first two stanzas, whose nature, causes and further effects Coleridge has gradually exposed. Paradoxically the grief which found "no natural outlet, no relief/In word or sigh or tear" has found gradual relief in the very writing of the poem; in the writing of a poem to someone Coleridge loves. Wordsworth in his *Immortality Ode* also refers to an unexplained grief:

To me alone came a thought of grief;  
A timely utterance gave that thought relief,  
And I again am strong.

Some critics think that this "timely utterance" was the poem "My heart leaps up when I behold". Some think it was "Resolution and Independence". The important thing is that it was a poem. The difference between Wordsworth and Coleridge is that Wordsworth's relief arises from the self-therapy involved in writing a poem, and perhaps from taking heart from an admirable old leech-gatherer moulded by nature, whereas Coleridge's arises not just from writing a poem, but from writing a Verse-Letter to someone he loves. The stimulus and inspiration for his clear self-analysis is Sara.

Part of the relief lies in unravelling the grief and seeing it for the complex thing it is. Another passage from his note-books will elucidate the point.

One excellent use of communication of sorrows to a friend is this: that in relating what ails us we ourselves first know exactly what the real grief is—and see it for itself, in its own form and limits—unspoken grief is a misty medley of which the real affliction only plays the first fiddle—blow the horn, to a scattered mob of obscure feelings etc.<sup>20</sup>

In the process of addressing Sara Coleridge dispels the mist, and sees clearly that his "real affliction" is the absence of love in his marital life, while his inability to respond to nature, his loss of joy and the stifling of his creative powers (all arising from this absence of love) are the "scattered mob of obscure feelings" which in the course of the poem are disentangled and sharply defined.

At the end of stanza sixteen, Coleridge returns after about 190 lines, and now, under the inspiration of the wind and Sara's affection, to a deeper

These mountains too, these vales, these woods,  
these lakes,

- They are not to me now the things, which once they were.

Stanza 17 : O Sara : We receive but what we give,  
And in our life alone does nature live.  
Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud—  
And would we aught behold of higher worth  
Than that inanimate cold world allowed  
To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd,  
Ah : from the soul itself must issue forth  
A light, a glory and a luminous cloud  
Enveloping the earth !

And from the soul itself must there be sent  
A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth,  
Of all the sweet sounds the life and element.

Stanza 18 : O pure of heart ! Thou needst not ask of me  
What this strong music in the soul may be,  
What and wherein it doth exist,  
This light, this glory, this fair luminous mist,  
This beautiful and beauty-making power !  
Joy, innocent Sara ! Joy that ne'er was given  
Save to the pure, and in their purest power,  
Joy, Sara ! is the spirit and the power,  
That wedding nature to us gives in dower—  
A new earth and new heaven  
Undreamt of by the sensual and the proud !

Joy is that strong voice, Joy that luminous cloud—  
We, we ourselves rejoice ;

And thence flows all that charms or ear or sight  
All melodies, the echoes of that voice,  
All colours a suffusion of that light.

He repeats his deduction in stanza three that there can be no attunement to nature, unless there is a responding passion from within : "And in our life alone does nature live". He now goes further and describes that passion as "a light, a glory, and a luminous cloud" issuing from the soul itself. This light and glory are, of course, joy, without which the world appears cold and inanimate, and people are reduced to "the poor loveless ever anxious crowd", the same joyless crowd of which Eliot was to write over a century later :

A crowd flowed over London bridge, so many,  
I had not thought death had undone so many.

The reader will have noticed the reminiscences in the last three stanzas of certain crucial lines from Wordsworth's *Immortality Ode* : "But oft I seem to feel and ever more to fear/They are not to me, now the things which once they were" is an echo of "Turn whereso'er I may/By night or day/The things which I have seen now can see no more" ; and "a light, a glory, and a luminous cloud" is an echo of "Whither is fled the visionary gleam ? Where is it now, the glory and the dream ?", and of "But trailing clouds of glory do we come...". Coleridge's reminiscences are conscious and meant to underline the difference between Wordsworth and himself. For Wordsworth the glory that has passed from the earth is not joy. On the contrary Wordsworth affirms ecstatically : "the fulness of your bliss I feel—I feel it all". The glory that has vanished is in fact a certain way of perceiving which we all have in childhood, "when external things" do not seem to have any "external existence", but seem to be inherent in the child's "own material nature", a way of apprehending the world which gradually disappears as we grow older. It is replaced by a way of perceiving which is strongly coloured by a moral sense derived from man's everyday intercourse with man, and by a sense of mortality which makes things significant and precious. Nor does this loss of glory refer to the loss of Wordsworth's poetic powers. As Trilling has convincingly demonstrated, the *Ode* far from being "a dirge sung over departing powers" is "actually a dedication to new powers". These powers reside in a mature awareness of the world from which the glory has fled. The new dedication is signalled in those moving concluding lines of the *Ode* : "Thanks to the human heart by which we live",



It is significant that Coleridge published his "Dejection" on the date of Wordsworth's marriage to Mary Hutchinson, as if to emphasise the difference between his unhappiness in marriage and Wordsworth's prospective happiness in marriage and his imaginative sterility and Wordsworth's creativeness. It is paradoxical of course that the Verse-Letter and the Ode should be two of his finest poems.

Before going on to the last two stanzas I should like to make a few concluding remarks about the organisation of the poem. It will have been noticed how Coleridge starts an analysis, drops it and then comes back to it with deeper insight after over a 100 lines. In "Dejection", however, Coleridge makes the analysis of the themes of the relationship between nature and the poet's mood, and of the loss of joy and shaping spirit of imagination continuous. It has a logical coherence absent in the Verse-Letter. Unfortunately this coherence has been achieved at the cost of sacrificing the role of the wind as a governing principle of the poem, without, however, removing it from the poem. Moreover by omitting all details of a private nature Coleridge has not been able to carry his analysis as far as the cause for the loss of joy i.e., the absence of love.

Although the Verse-Letter has no intellectual coherence, it has a unity of its own determined by two factors. The first is the logic of emotion or what Coleridge called "the streamy nature of association" which, he added, "thinking reason curbs and rudders",<sup>21</sup> It is ironical that Coleridge should have considered this "streamy nature of association" uncurbed by reason as the source of moral evil. He would probably have described much of the Verse-Letter as the "idle flitting phantasies", "the shapings of the unregenerate mind".<sup>22</sup> But although this train of association is not ruddered by the intellect it is not haphazard; there is a ruddering force, and this is Coleridge's affection for Sara. The second controlling factor is, of course, a natural force, the wind. What is important to realise is that in this letter there is little or no conscious effort to organise. This is why you cannot call the poem disorganised; rather it is, unorganised. What organisation there is, is not a conscious level; it is unconscious.

Humphrey House has pointed out a number of other ways in which the poem has suffered because of the change of sequence of ideas and the omission of personal details.<sup>23</sup> Although it is true that Coleridge as critic of his own poetry was mostly successful in choosing the stanzas of highest quality, ironically, considering his insight into the unconscious factor in life and poetry, he was unaware of the part it played in his own poetry. This meant that he not only did not as a conscious critic give a more perfect

shape to the unconscious organisation of his poem, while at the same time giving it the intellectual coherence it lacks, but in fact destroyed the unconscious organisation (in "Dejection"). T. S. Eliot has written : "... the bad poet is usually unconscious where he ought to be conscious, and conscious where he ought to be unconscious..."<sup>24</sup> Coleridge's case demonstrates, however, that there are times when the poet ought to be conscious of the exact part played by the unconscious ; otherwise there is a danger of a clash between the two.

Let me now look at the last two stanzas which are the finale to the paean to Joy :

Stanza 19 : Sister and friend of my dearest choice !

Thou being innocent and full of love,  
And nested with the darlings of thy love,  
And feeling in thy soul, heart, lips and arms  
Even what the conjugal and mother dove,  
That borrows genial warmth from those she warms,  
Feels in the thrilled wings, blessedly outspread—  
Thou freed a while from cares and human dread  
By the immenseness of the good and fair  
Which thou see'st everywhere—

Stanza 20 : Thus, thus shouldst thou rejoice !

To thee would all things live from pole to pole,  
Their life the eddying of the living soul—  
O dear ! O innocent ! O full of love !  
A very friend ! A sister of my choice—  
O dear, as light and impulse from above,  
Thus may'st thou ever, evermore rejoice !

The last four stanzas constitute Coleridge's fullest realisation of joy, a realisation which can be felt in the ecstatic rhythm of the verse. Coleridge is writing here about joy as possessed by Sara, and only by implicit contrast of the absence of joy in his own life. These stanzas are a dedication of joy to Sara rather than a wail of lamentation over his own loss of joy.

A few words should be said about the lovely image in stanza nineteen, where Coleridge fuses the images of the stockdove from stanza five, and the dear abiding home of the Dove Cottage circle—from stanza ten. We are given a concrete expression of love felt in the body and heart, felt "in the soul, heart, lips and arms", and "in the thrilled wings, blessedly outspread", a love which is mutual ("the tranquil vigour of affection fed by affection") and which is the source of joy. This is the animal love his wife lacked.

The image of the stock-dove and Coleridge's whole attitude to Sara indicate that the kind of love he was drawn to was not passionate love but love which is warm, tender, affectionate and somewhat maternal. It was love which required protection and flourished in a weather-fenced wood, in a dear abiding home, or in the shelter of wings blessedly outspread. It was strikingly similar to the kind of love Herbert sought from God :

O let me when thy roof my soul hath hid,  
O let me roost and nestle there.

(Temper)

But unlike Herbert who after much struggle achieved a fulness of love, Coleridge could fulfil his intense longing for mutual love only fitfully throughout his life. His relationship with Sara broke up and in such poetry as he wrote afterwards he returned again and again to the theme of lost love. What the loss of love meant for him can be gauged from the following entry :

If I have not heard from you very recently, and if the last letter had not happened to be full of explicit love and feeling, then I conjure up shadows into substances—and am miserable.<sup>25</sup>

Although in 1802 when he was writing this verse-letter he was at the nadir of his marital unhappiness, he had at least the inspiration of his love for Sara. But he was to find that his self-analysis was only too correct. The death of love and joy, the essential conditions for creative activity, led to the death of his "shaping spirit of imagination." After "Dejection" he was to write no major poetry. Unlike George Herbert he could never write of the rejuvenation of his poetic powers :

And now in age I bud again,  
After so many deaths I live and write ;  
I once more smell the dew and rain,  
And relish versing : O my onely light,  
It cannot be  
That I am he  
On whom thy tempests fell all night.

(The Flower)

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Ernest de Selincourt. *Wordsworthian and other studies*.
2. See H. House. *Coleridge*. The Clark lectures, 1951-2.
3. *Coleridge's Notebooks*, vol. I. edited by Kathleen Coburn ; Entry No. 979.
4. M. H. is Mary Hutchinson who later became Wordsworth's wife.

5. Op. cit. Coburn No. 926.
6. Op. cit. Coburn No. 1577.
7. See essay by M. H. Abrams "The Correspondent Breeze : a romantic metaphor" in *English Romantic Poets. Modern Essays in Criticism*.
8. *The Prelude*, V. 222.
9. Op. cit. Abrams p. 39.
10. See "Essay on the Ode" in *The Liberal Imagination*.
11. Quoted by K. Coburn in *Inquiring Spirit*.
12. From a letter to his brother in March, 1798, quoted by J. B. Beers in his edition of *Coleridge : Poems*, p. 115.
13. Op. cit. House, chapter VI.
14. Quoted by House, Op. cit. p. 147.
15. Op. cit. House, p. 136.
16. Op. cit. House, p. 166.
17. Both statements are quoted by House, Op. cit. p. 142.
18. *Inquiring Spirit*, edited K. Coburn, p. 61.
19. Quoted by Ernest de Selincourt, op. cit. p. 59.
20. *Notebooks*, Coburn No. 1599.
21. *Notebooks*, Coburn No. 1770.
22. See Coleridge's poem, "The Eolian Harp".
23. Op. cit. House, pp. 133-141.
24. T. S. Eliot : *Selected Essays*, p. 21.
25. *Notebooks*, Coburn No. 1601.

# TOWARDS A DISTINCTION BETWEEN FANCY AND IMAGINATION

---

S. K. DAS

THE history of the two terms—*fancy* and *imagination*—is somewhat confused and the reader is often baffled about the antecedents of the battle and uncertain who is fighting on whose side. But the history is also distinguished. It involves the names of Chaucer, Dryden, Addison, Johnson, Wordsworth and Coleridge besides a large number of critics and writers of the modern times. But inspite of the wide divergence of opinion regarding the exact meaning of the two terms, they have endured.

In early use these terms were often synonymous. It is only in their later use that the words are commonly distinguished—'fancy' being used to express an aptitude for the invention or illustrative or decorative imagery, and imagination to denote the power of giving to ideal creations the inner consistency of realities. Chaucer uses the word 'imagination' to signify the mental consideration of actions or events not in existence.

To him her herte bar, he sholde be  
Sad, wys and trewe, of wordes avisee,  
With-uten any other affeccoun  
Of love, or evil imaginacioun.

(*Legend of Good Women*, 1520-23)

Here 'imaginacioun' is only another name for scheming or devising a plan or project. From the beginning, which in English is the late medieval period, *fancy* was used to represent 'the action of forming a mental concept of what is not actually present to the senses.' The concept of fancy implied very often something capricious or mistaken or lying. It would be difficult to find in any English writer from the fourteenth century to the seventeenth a use of the word that is not derogatory or condescending at the least. 'Charming capriciousness' is the favourite sense with the Elizabethans who frivolously confused it with the spirit of love. Shakespeare describes Armado as 'the child of fancy' (I-1-171) and implies caprice or changeful mood combined with a certain fantasticalness of attire and speech. In expressions—'Tell me where is fancy bred' (*M. o. V.* III-ii. 63) and 'In maiden meditation fancy-free' (*M. N. D.* II. i. 164)—

the word 'fancy' clearly means amorous inclination or love. Helena's use of the word 'imagination' :

I have forgot him : my imagination

Carries no favour in't but Bertram's. (*All's Well* I. i. 93-94)

suggests that faculty of the mind by which are formed images or concepts of external objects not present to the sense, and of their relations. It may also be interpreted as memory. But in the famous lines from *A Mid Summer Night's Dream*

And as imagination bodies forth

The forms of things unknown.....(V. i. 14-15)

Shakespeare is distinctly referring to creative imagination, the power of forming new and striking images. Spenser uses the word fancy in an inferior sense in the mask of Cupid :

The first was Fancy, like a lonely boy,  
Of rare aspect, and beautie without peare...  
His garment neither was of silk nor say,  
But painted plumes, in goodly order dight,  
Like as the sunburnt Indians do aray  
Their tawny bodies, in their proudest plight :  
At those same plumes, so seemed he vaine and light,  
That by his gate might easily appeare ;  
For still he far'd as dauncing in delight;  
And in his hand a windy fan did beare,  
That in the idle aire he mou'd still here and there.

*Faerie Queene* III. xii. 7-8)

Milton's eulogy of Shakespeare

...Sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's child,  
Warble his native wood-notes wild.

(*L'Allegro* 133-34)

implies creative imagination. But Milton restates the traditional view, the view that fancy is capricious, in the speech where Adam tells Eve that her dream is not necessarily to be trusted as in sleep the fancy is free to imitate the rational faculty :

mimic Fansie wakes

To imitate her ; but misjoining shapes

Wilde work produces oft, and most in dreams,

Ill matching words and deeds long past or late.

(*P. L.* V. 110-13 )

Bacon believes that the imagination is not tied to the laws of matter :  
"Poesy...doth truly refer to the imagination ; which, being not tied to

the laws of the matter, may at pleasure join that which Nature hath severed, and sever that which Nature hath joined".<sup>1</sup> Hobbes's conception of fancy and imagination derives much from both classical and medieval psychology and in his use of the terms he is far from consistent. With Hobbes fancy is sometimes an adorning and beautifying agency and sometimes a creative faculty. He uses fancy in the Greek sense, as signifying 'appearance' to serve as an equivalent to what the Latins called 'imagination' in describing that which remains in the mind after the original subject is removed: the image of the thing seen.<sup>2</sup> Later in his famous essay "The Virtues of an Heroic Poem" (1675) Hobbes extends the meaning of the word and uses it to imply sublimity—"For in Fancy consisteth the Sublimity of a Poet".<sup>3</sup>

It seems that from the fourteenth century to Dryden, the words—fancy and imagination—had no special connection with literary criticism; they shared the one primary sense, fancy being from the beginning of inferior associations. It was Dryden who was the first to use the words in a specialised sense for the purposes of literary criticism. He refers to the faculty of imagination in his well-known discussion on the place of wit in poetry:

So then, the first happiness of the Poet's Imagination is properly Invention, or finding of the thought; the second is Fancy, or the variation, deriving or moulding of that thought, as the judgment represents it proper to the subject; the third is Elocution, or the Art of clothing and adorning that thought so found and varied, in apt, significant and sounding words: The quickness of the Imagination is seen in the Invention, the fertility in the Fancy, and the accuracy in the Expression.<sup>4</sup>

With remarkable boldness Dryden has identified *imagination*, a newcomer to the vocabulary of criticism, with the most widely accepted literary dogma of that age, the dogma that poetry is a matter of 'wit'. Wit in the poet, Dryden observes, is no other than the faculty of imagination. Dryden justifies his title to be considered the first great English critic because he welcomed the unattempted. He is clearly debating not what a poet ought to do but what processes of the mind lie behind poetic activity. He tells us that the imagination is "like a nimble spaniel that ranges through the field till it springs the quarry it hunted after."<sup>5</sup> The imagination then, according to Dryden, turns hunter among the stock of images collected by the memory. However, Dryden's pronouncement that the fancy is an element of the imagination has little justification and no intrinsic merit.

By the turn of the century the Augustan critics were using the terms indiscriminately. Thomas Rymer does not seem to make any distinction

between fancy and imagination. In the *Tragedies of the Last Age* (1678) he states : "...fancy, I think, in poetry, is like *faith* in religion : it makes far discoveries, and soars above reason, but never clashes or runs against it."<sup>6</sup> William Temple's discussion *Of Poetry* (1690) identifies fancy and imagination as the same faculty productive of images and similitudes among them :

There must be a spritely imagination or fancy, fertile in a thousand productions ranging over infinite ground, piercing into every corner, and by the light of that true poetical fire discovering a thousand little bodies or images in the world, and similitudes among them, unseen to common eyes, and which could not be discovered without the rays of that sun. <sup>7</sup> •

In Temple the two terms are clearly synonymous. Addison also speaks of "The Pleasures of the Imagination or Fancy" and says that he will use these two terms 'promiscuously.'<sup>8</sup> He continues in an arbitrary vein : 'By the pleasure of the Imagination I mean only such pleasures as arise originally from sight' and he goes on to distinguish two kinds of such pleasures—(i) pleasure derived from such objects as are before our eyes and (ii) pleasure derived 'from the ideas of visible objects when the objects are not actually before our eye, but called up into our memories, or formed into agreeable visions of things that are either absent or fictitious.' Addison is confining the meaning of the word imagination in an arbitrary manner to its Latin sense, the remembrance of things-seen. In the *Spectator* 419 Addison refers to the 'fairy way of writing' and says that "the poet quite loses sight of nature" and presents things which have no existence, but what he bestows on them". Far from being contemptible such writing is more difficult than any other because the poet has "no pattern to follow in it, and must work altogether out of his own invention".<sup>9</sup> In this passage the Latin sense of the word has been extended and imagination is no longer limited to the world of sense ; it has not only the whole circle of nature for its province, but also creates new worlds for its own. Johnson uses the two words in his *Dictionary* as interchangeable.

From Addison developed various important ideas. Following him later writers looked upon the creative act as something inward and delegated it to the faculty of imagination. The concept of the creative imagination which elevates the imagination above the reason and all other faculties by its claim that this is a mental process re-enacting God, came to be regarded as proof of a truly original genius. Edward Young writes :

there are who write with vigour, and success, to the world's delight,  
• and their own renown. These are the glorious fruits where genius



prevails. The mind of a man of genius is a fertile and pleasant field, pleasant as Elysium, and fertile as Tempe ; it enjoys a perpetual spring. Of that spring, originals are the fairest flowers : imitations are of quicker growth, but fainter bloom. Imitations are of two kinds : one of nature, one of authors. The first we call originals, and confine the term imitation to the second.<sup>10</sup>

He argues that an original may be said to be of a 'vegetable nature' it rises spontaneously from the vital root of genius ; it grows, it is not made. "Imitations are often a sort of manufacture wrought up by those mechanics, art and labour, out of pre-existent materials not their own."<sup>11</sup> Young's comments suggest another development—the poet's creativity resides peculiarly in his non-realistic inventions.

Richard Hurd expands Addison's concept of poetry as a new creation in such a way as to distinguish the world of poetry from the world of experience, and philosophical truth. Yet in his use of the terms—fancy and imagination—Hurd does not seem to make any real distinction. He compares the methods of the seventeenth century poets and concludes :

The glimpse, you have had of it, will help your imagination to conceive the rest. And without more words you will readily apprehend that the fancies of our modern bards are not only more gallant, but, on a change of the scene, more sublime, more terrible, more alarming, than those of the classic fablers.<sup>12</sup>

Kames in his *Elements of Criticism* uses the word *imagination* to signify the singular power of fabricating images without any foundation in reality. Burke seems to recognize the creative power of imagination for he says that the mind of man "possesses a sort of creative power of its own ; either in representing at pleasure the images of things in the order and manner in which they were received by the senses, or in combining those images in a new manner, and according to a different order. This power is called imagination."<sup>13</sup> But the phrase 'combining the images in a new manner' implies a degree of mechanical adjustment. The eighteenth century character is unmistakable even if he is suggesting that imagination may not correspond to the reality of things.

Locke had no very high regard for poetry. 'Imagination' in Locke simply signifies an idea or concept. For instance he says that "when we speak of justice, or gratitude, we frame to ourselves no imagination of anything existing."<sup>14</sup> For him it was a matter of wit and the task of wit is to combine ideas and thereby to make up pleasant pictures and agreeable visions in the fancy. In his view imagination is a quite irresponsible element and it is not troubled with truth or reality.

The concept that the inventive process consists in the severance of

sensible wholes into parts and the combination of parts into new wholes united even the antagonistic schools of eighteenth century philosophy. Dugald Stewart objected to the prevailing tendency of disintegrating the mental content into mere sequences of sensation and idea ; he stressed instead the concept of mental faculties and powers. He also anticipated Coleridge in distinguishing between imagination and fancy. To him fancy was a lower faculty that presented sensible materials upon which the imagination can operate with its complex powers of apprehension, abstraction and taste. Yet, it may be said, Stewart's concept of the poetic imagination largely follows the familiar eighteenth century pattern. Its creative power consists only in the fact that it is able to make a selection or discrimination of qualities and of circumstances, from a variety of different objects, and by combining and disposing these it can form a new creation of its own.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, we must not project into Stewart's word 'creation' any special significance. It did not yet come to mean the vital principle which organizes chaos into cosmos by a self-generating energy of its own.<sup>16</sup> In the eighteenth century usage we recognize the standard imaginative process as the re-combination of wholes but not a complete transformation.

Hartley's theory of association demonstrated rigorously that all the complex contents and processes of the human mind were derived from the elements of simple sensation. Very soon this concept of association became incorporated into the standard theories of imagination.<sup>17</sup> The process of imagination was conceived of as images held together by purely mechanical causes of attraction. Newton explained the genesis of law, order and beauty as the design of a purposeful God. This mechanistic interpretation of the universe was also reflected in the activity of the mind. In all composition, therefore, it was requisite that the writer had some intention ; a production without design would resemble the raving of a mad man. Every work of genius is a whole, made up of the regular combination of different parts, or so organised as to become altogether subservient to a common end. "Imagination", says Alexander Gerard, "is no unskilful architect" for it "in a great measure, by its own force, by means of its associating power, after repeated attempts and transpositions, designs a regular and well-proportioned edifice."<sup>18</sup>

## II

Not until four decades after Gerard's *Essay* do we find in England a full development of the organic theory of imagination. But the distinction between fancy and imagination had already attained sufficient currency "to warrant the assumption that Coleridge's was by no means unique ; and considering the assimilative character of his mind, it is difficult to believe

that his distinction was untouched by the external influence which was at hand to direct it." <sup>19</sup>

Here, I think it is necessary to combat a peripicious trend in literary criticism—the habit of looking to Coleridge for an explanation of Wordsworth's distinction between fancy and imagination. The distinction as made by Wordsworth is not to be regarded as a curious misstatement of Coleridge's. Wordsworth was by no means a tame disciple of Coleridge but had given the question serious and independent thought. This is the reason why I choose to discuss briefly Wordsworth's distinction first.

Wordsworth's earliest attempt to define imagination and fancy is to be found in a note appended to *The Thorn* in the 1800 edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*. To clarify the character of Martha Ray's story Wordsworth makes this statement: "Superstitious men are almost always men of slow faculties and deep feelings; their minds are not loose, but adhesive; they have a reasonable share of imagination, by which word I mean the faculty which produces impressive effects out of simple elements; but they are utterly destitute of fancy, the power by which pleasure and surprise are excited by sudden varieties of situation and an accumulated imagery." <sup>20</sup> As Wordsworth did not reprint this note in editions after 1805, it has been largely passed over by critics, who assume that he felt that his definition of fancy and imagination in the Preface of 1815 made the earlier explanation of the term unnecessary. But this may be regarded as a very useful complement to the more elaborate definition of the Preface.

In the Preface of 1815 Wordsworth defines imagination as "the power of depicting, and fancy of evoking and combining. The imagination is formed by patient observation; the fancy by a voluntary activity in shifting the scenery of the mind. The more accurate the imagination, the more safely may a painter or a poet undertake a delineation, or a description, without the presence of the objects to be characterised. The more versatile the fancy, the more original and striking will be the decorations produced." <sup>21</sup>

Wordsworth also offers us a series of illustrations, both of imagination and fancy from his own poetry and that of other poets. There is general agreement among critics that these illustrations do not perform adequately the task Wordsworth had assigned to them. For instance Wellek considers Wordsworth's illustrations "curiously inept" and says that "they merely cite very ordinary metaphorical-transfers." <sup>22</sup> Such a characterization may be fairly applied to the illustrations from Virgil, Shakespeare and Milton; but when Wordsworth discusses those from his own poetry, he speaks with authority of a mode of symbolism that is far from ordinary. Indeed

in his comments on the opening lines of *To The Cuckoo* and the stone-beast image from *Resolution and Independence* Wordsworth gives us a succinct statement of what he conceived to be the effects of the poetic imagination, in the first poem on an image of sound and in the second on an image of sight. In these discussions Wordsworth consistently emphasizes the view that all the powers, which he attributes to the imagination—conferring, abstracting, modifying, shaping, and creating—work toward a common goal, to free the object of all sense of limitation. Objects, Wordsworth observes, are “endowed by the mind with properties that do not adhere in them, upon an incitement from properties and qualities the existence of which is inherent and obvious.”<sup>23</sup> This is how he explains the imaginative process involved in the famous passage from *Resolution and Independence*:

The stone is endowed with something of the power of life to approximate it to the sea-beast ; and the sea-beast stripped of some of its vital qualities to assimilate it to the stone ; which intermediate image is thus treated for the purpose of bringing the original image, that of the stone, to a nearer resemblance to the figure and condition of the aged Man ; who is divested of so much of the indication of life and motion as to bring him to the point where the two objects unite and coalesce in just comparison.<sup>24</sup>

The result of this process is an imaginative account neither of stone nor of the sea-beast ; nor is it simply of a man, but rather of an old man ‘not all alive or dead.’ By endowing an inanimate object with something approaching life and taking away from a creature actually living some of the qualities we associate with life, Wordsworth blurs the distinction between the living man and the inanimate object. The imagination has so modified the image of the aged leech-gatherer that the boundary between man and nature is metaphorically denied.

With these illustrations and comments Wordsworth seems to conclude his analysis of this faculty. But in a subsequent passage on the subject, which is rarely quoted, he gives a valuable clue to his theory of imagination :

The grand storehouses of enthusiastic and meditative Imagination, of poetical, as contra-distinguished from human and dramatic Imagination, are the prophetic and lyrical parts of the Holy Scriptures, and the works of Milton ; to which I cannot forbear to add those of Spenser. I select these writers in preference to those of ancient Greece and Rome, because the anthropomorphism of the pagan religion subjected the minds of the greatest poets in those countries too much to the bondage of definite form ;

from which the Hebrews were preserved by their abhorrence of idolatry. This abhorrence was almost as strong in our great epic Poet, both from circumstances of his life, and from the constitution of his mind. However imbued the surface might be with classical literature, he was a Hebrew in soul ; and all things tended in him towards the sublime. <sup>25</sup>

The emphasis on freedom from "the bondage of definite form", the association of the imagination with the sublime, and the preference for the Hebrew over the classical 'soul'—all these attitudes are of great importance in Wordsworth's theory of imagination ; and the implications of these attitudes extend far beyond his aesthetics.

Let us now turn to Wordsworth's attempt at defining fancy. In the Preface of 1815 he approaches fancy by way of contrast to imagination. He begins the discussion with his famous objection that Coleridge's definition of fancy ( "the aggregative and associative power" ) is too general. He thinks that to "aggregate and associate, to evoke and to combine, belong as well to the Imagination as to the Fancy." The difference, Wordsworth argues, is not in these activities, but is rather that "either the materials evoked and combined are different ; or they are brought together under a different law, and for a different purpose." According to him the materials worked upon by fancy need not be susceptible of change in their constitution, from her touch ; and where they admit modification, it is enough for her purpose if it be slight, limited, and evanescent." The Imagination, on the other hand, "recoils from everything but the plastic, the pliant, and the indefinite." <sup>26</sup> What is significant is that Wordsworth stresses some quality or qualities inherent in the objects themselves to permit the powers of poetry to transform them.

Fancy, according to Wordsworth, is also a different quality. The materials are different or they are brought together under a different law and for a different purpose. When imagination frames a comparison it may not be very striking at first sight ; the resemblance depends less upon outline than upon effect. Wordsworth refutes Coleridge's definition and states that fancy is a faculty not unworthy of a genius. He even does not hesitate to ascribe to fancy a creative power. Wordsworth thus leaves open the door between fancy and imagination by allowing that they might both associate and combine. But Coleridge slammed it. It is, however, unfortunate that this creative power of fancy has not been clearly demonstrated by Wordsworth in his *Poems of the Fancy*. The fancy of Wordsworth is clearly a faculty of value to the mature poet, charged with the important moral task of detecting lurking affinities between nature and moral lesson. But far from guarding the moral Wordsworth has often explained it at

great length and with much iteration which arouses suspicion of untried possibilities in the scope and power of his poetic art. However, one's practice need not annul one's theory ; and today we are closer to Wordsworth's standpoint than to Coleridge's.

### III

The historical importance of Coleridge's theory demands greater attention than what has been given to any single author discussed above. And though his observations on fancy and imagination are wellknown, I should like to discuss them in some detail. Coleridge regards imagination as a mystical quality. It is distinct from and independent of the other human faculties which govern reasoning, emotion and sensation. Coleridge begins by saying that Milton had 'a highly imaginative mind' and Cowley a very 'fanciful' mind ;<sup>27</sup> and that the distinction is analogous to that between delirium and mania. In delirium the mind pours forth its contents incoherently, that is with no unifying principle to order its sequences save the law of association. In mania the mind is obsessed by a fixed idea ; it sees and interprets all things in relation to that idea, and so has, though in a morbid form, a co-ordinating power. If we translate disease into health, delirium becomes fancy and mania becomes imagination. The ground of this comparison is made clear elsewhere :

You may conceive the difference in kind between the Fancy and the Imagination in this way, that if the check of the senses and the reason were withdrawn, the first would become delirium, and the last mania.<sup>28</sup>

However, Coleridge often insisted that fancy and imagination are not exclusive of or inimical to one another. He disapproves of Wordsworth's account and says :

I am disposed to conjecture, that he has mistaken the co-presence of fancy and imagination for the operation of the latter singly. A man may work with two very different tools at the same moment ; each has its share in the work, but the work effected by each is very different.<sup>29</sup>

And again :

Imagination must have fancy, in fact the higher intellectual powers can only act through a corresponding energy of the lower.<sup>30</sup>

The full account of the distinction between fancy and imagination is given in the *Biographia Literaria* Chapter XIII. This has been the battleground of the critics for a long time. Coleridge, as I have understood him, seems to celebrate his triumph over the old tradition of Locke and Hartley,

which had assumed that the mind in perception was wholly passive, a mere recorder of impressions, 'a lazy looker-on on an external world'. The system of Locke and Hartley was well-suited to an age of scientific speculation which found its representative voice in Newton. The mechanistic explanation which both philosophers and scientists gave of the world implied scanty respect for the human self and specially to its more instinctive convictions. But Coleridge affirms that the mind works actively in the mere act of perception ; it knows its objects not by passive reception, but by its own energy and under its own necessary forms. It knows not mere objects as such, but itself in the objects.

If the mind be not *passive*, if it be indeed made in God's image, and that, too, in the sublimest sense, the *Image of the Creator*, there is ground for suspicion that any system built on the passiveness of the mind must be false as a system. <sup>81</sup>

Like Blake Coleridge also believed that the mind is the very source of the spiritual energy and that in some way it partakes of the activity of God. Blake says prophetically :

The world of Imagination is the world of Eternity ; it is the divine bosom into which we shall all go after the death of the Vegetated body. This world of Imagination is Infinite and Eternal, whereas the world of Generation or Vegetation, is Finite and Temporal. <sup>82</sup>

Coleridge does not speak with so apocalyptic a certainty, but his conclusion "the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" is not very different from Blake's. For Blake as well as for Coleridge the imagination is nothing less than God as He operates in the human mind.

Coleridge states that it is the Secondary Imagination, not the Primary which is at work in the making of poetry. "It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate." The daily routine world in itself is cold and inanimate. Nature's world is brazen ; the poets deliver it golden.

The poet, described in ideal perfection brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone and a spirit of unity, that blends, and ( as it were ) fuses, each into each by that sympathetic and magical power, to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination. <sup>83</sup>

Fancy, which employs subordinate faculties, is only the drapery of poetic genius, while "imagination is the soul that is everywhere, and in each ; and forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole." Coleridge says that it is no mere romantic escapism, though it may sometimes take that form ; it has been the originating impulse of poets at all times, and not

merely of poets, but of seers and saints and scientists as well, in fact of all who combat the habit of

Viewing all objects unremittingly

In disconnection dead and spiritless ; ( *The Excursion*, IV, 961-2 )

The imagination, then, is the mind in its highest state of creative activity ; its acts are acts of growth and it remoulds the stubborn raw materials into living and new wholes.

In Chapter XII of the *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge attempts the psychological task of arranging the human faculties according to their worth. He says :

These ( the human faculties ) I would arrange under the different senses and powers : as the eye, the ear...the imagination, or shaping and modifying power ; the fancy, or the aggregative and associative power ; the understanding or the regulative, substantiating and realizing power...<sup>84</sup>

This arrangement of faculties according to their relative worth and dignity is an integral part of Coleridge's doctrine of imagination, since it distinguishes imaginative creation from inferior activities carried on under the guidance of reason. Neither Understanding in which the English philosophers of empiricism like Locke, Hobbes and Hume found the highest human excellence, nor Reasoning which German metaphysicians like Kant could not transcend, possesses supreme worth. It is imagination alone which holds the secrets of man's capacity to rise to oneness with the absolute, to draw all things to one, to see all things in one.

Fancy, on the contrary, receives all its materials from the phenomenal world, and does not work under the creative inspiration available to transcending vision. It rearranges the ideas derived by the subordinate faculties and merely re-assembles the image that are accessible to those inferior faculties. Images are preserved ready-made in memory. What fancy does is simply to link together certain images with the help of the correlating suggestive power of association. The image of an object of common experience, say a flower, may by association arouse the thought of a fullness of blossoming, and hence rhetorically, by means of fancy, we may speak of the flowering of genius. But no stretch of fancy can yield from the sight of a flower 'thoughts too deep for tears' as Wordsworth claims for the meanest flower. The poet becomes a seer. The ordinary image of the flower vanishes ; a new image takes its place.

I consider it relevant here to take into account the theories which Coleridge propounded on the subject of Words and Images, for they explain the difference between fancy and imagination more clearly. A



word, according to Coleridge, whether it is a mark on a paper or a sound, is yet a stimulus to that response which we call the understanding of it. While rousing this response, it may have only a limited artificial meaning, as in dictionary, or it may, as a living being possess inexhaustible meanings. Images though they appear to the inferior faculties of man as 'fixities and definites' are by no means truly fixed and definite. They may acquire a new power under the influence of increased consciousness. It lends to the image an ideal life transferred from the poet's own spirit. Facts for Coleridge are more than material; they are spiritual. Fancy works by observation; it collects and re-arranges only material facts. Imagination on the other hand works by meditation and reveals truths behind material facts. Under the influence of imagination we give more than we receive.

Observation has a predetermined field; meditation communicates a microscopic power. <sup>85</sup>

Thought perishes and we see into the life of things. The vision of an object under imagination yields thereby a result totally different from what is given by the process of image-formation under the operations of fancy. This inferior role of fancy to the imagination has its kinship with medieval and Tudor usage, only in so far as it is an inferior role.

Let us now examine Coleridge's famous examples of fancy and imagination. In this I crave the indulgence of the knowledgeable reader to go through a few paragraphs of discussion that has been made by far more competent people. As fancy we have

Full gently now she takes him by the hand,  
A lily prison'd in a gaol of snow,  
Of ivory in an alabaster hand;  
So white a friend engirts so white a foe.

( *Venus and Adonis* 361-64 )

Adonis's hand and a lily are both fair; both are white; both are perhaps pure. But there the links stop. These attributes to the hand in no way change the hand. They do not work upon our perception of Adonis or his hand. The same absence of interaction between the parts of the comparison is shown equally with 'prison'd' and 'gaol of snow'. The gaol and the hand are both enclosures, but Venus's hand is not a static enclosure and idea of whiteness will seem less compatible with the gaol. As Coleridge's instance of imagination we have

Look! how a bright star shooteth from the sky  
So glides he in the night from Venus's eye.

( *Venus and Adonis*, 815-16 )

Coleridge's comment is :

How many images and feelings are here brought together without effort and without discord—the beauty of Adonis—the rapidity of his flight the yearning yet hopelessness of the enamoured gazer—and a shadowy ideal character thrown over the whole.<sup>86</sup>

This is imagination, according to Coleridge, making real to himself and to us, the departure of Adonis from Venus ; the fall of the shooting star and the flight of Adonis become one in a moment of creative vision and are henceforth inseparable. I. A. Richards analyses it more fully :

The separable meanings of each word, *Look !* ( our surprise at the meteor, her's at the flight ), *star* ( a light-giver, an influence, a remote and uncontrollable thing ) *shooteth* ( the sudden, irremediable, portentous fall or death of what had been a guide, a destiny ), *the sky* ( the source of light and now of ruin ), *glides* ( not rapidity only, but fatal ease too ), *in the night* ( the darkness of the scene and of Venus' world now )—all these separable meanings are here brought into one.<sup>87</sup>

Coleridge's examples demonstrate that his central preoccupation was with the antithesis between a living whole or organism on the one hand and a mechanical juxtaposition of parts on the other. The poetic metaphor was to see all things into one, and the one in all things. This was affirmed by Coleridge in his famous statement :

This power...reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities : of sameness, with difference ; of the general, with the concrete ; the idea with the image ; the individual with the representative ; the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects ; a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order ; judgment ever awake and steady selfpossession, with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement ; ..<sup>88</sup>

These are the fundamental modes of the imaginative activity, dissolving to recreate, struggling to idealize and to unify dead objects.

According to Coleridge, then, imagination and fancy are two distinct faculties, not merely differing in degree but being different in kind. Coleridge's distinction was revolutionary in the sense that imagination and fancy no longer referred to the action of summoning up past experience to the mind, but to the manner in which the mind set about, for the purpose of making poetry, to use that experience.

IV

Coleridge's differentiation was, however, rarely followed and even Wordsworth said that the definition provided by Coleridge was too general. "To aggregate and to associate, to evoke and to combine, belong as well to the Imagination as to the Fancy..."<sup>39</sup> To this Coleridge replied: "If, by the power of evoking and combining, Mr. Wordsworth means the same as, and no more than, I meant by the aggregative and associative, I continue to deny, that it belongs at all to the imagination..."<sup>40</sup> The dispute did not end there. In Leigh Hunt's anthology *Imagination and Fancy* there is an attempt to resolve the difference between these faculties into a difference between levity and gravity in the poet's attitude.

Fancy... is a younger sister of Imagination, without the other's weight of thought and feeling. Imagination, indeed purely so called is all feeling; the feeling of the subtlest and most affecting analogies; the perception of sympathies in the nature of things, or in their popular attributes. Fancy is a sporting with their resemblance, real or supposed, and with airy and fantastical creations.<sup>41</sup>

Writing within fifty years Mill defines imagination as something akin to memory or the faculty by which external objects not present to the senses are images: "The imagination... to which the name is generally appropriated by the best writers of the present day (is) that which enables us, by a voluntary effort, to conceive the absent as if it were present..."<sup>42</sup> Others consider the difference as one between serious and playful poetry. This is how Ruskin looks at the distinction:

.. the imagination being at the heart of things, poises herself there, and is still, quiet, and brooding, comprehending all round her with her fixed look; but the fancy staying at the outside of things cannot see them all at once; but runs hither and thither... bounding merrily from point to point, and glittering here and there, but necessarily always settling, if she settle at all, on a point only, never embracing the whole.<sup>43</sup>

According to Ruskin fancy sees the outside; imagination sees the heart. Yet the feeling that fancy is an inferior faculty to imagination is inescapable from his distinction, and it is not clear whether he regarded this difference as a difference not of degree but of kind. Darwin speaks highly of imagination: "By this faculty he unites former images and ideas, independently of the will, and thus creates brilliant and novel results."<sup>44</sup> But Darwin has not made any attempt to distinguish it from fancy.

Pater's interpretation of the distinction between fancy and imagination is distinctly non-Coleridgean. Here is the controversial passage :

Some English critics at the beginning of the present century had a great deal to say concerning a distinction, of much importance, as they thought, in the true estimate of poetry, between the *Fancy*, and another more powerful faculty—the *Imagination*. This metaphysical distinction borrowed originally from the writings of the German philosophers, and perhaps not always clearly apprehended by those who talked of it, involved a far deeper and more vital distinction, with which indeed all true criticism more or less directly has to do, the distinction, namely, between higher and lower degrees of intensity in the poet's perception of his subject, and in his concentration of himself on his work. <sup>45</sup>

Pater's phrase 'the distinction between higher and lower degrees of intensity in the poet's perception of his subject' may be imprecise as Richards points out <sup>46</sup> yet it is not difficult to guess what he means. Pater, as I have understood him, stresses the fact that imagination and fancy cannot be desynonymized. It is only an observable difference between instances of mental process.

Lowes also clearly contradicts Coleridge. He considers the two powers as synonymous. He observes :

I have long had the feeling...that Fancy and Imagination are not two powers at all, but one. The valid distinction which exists between them lies, not in the materials with which they operate, but in the degree of intensity of the operant power itself. Working at high tension, the imaginative energy assimilates and transmutes ; keyed low, the same energy aggregates and yokes together those images which, at its highest pitch, it merges indissolubly into one. <sup>47</sup>

The fallacy in Lowes's argument is obvious. He states that the materials operated with are the same ; only the intensity of the power varies. It may be pointed out that there are images which no power will fuse together. For instance we may refer to the following lines

And like a lobster boy'd the Morn  
From black to red began to turn. <sup>48</sup>

Lowes seems to suggest that if the operant power had been working at a higher tension, the images of the lobster and the morn would have been fused and merged indissolubly into one. Richards rejects it categorically and says that it will not be possible to do so and it "as evident as the fact that no biologic pressure, however great, will make a whelk grow wings." <sup>49</sup> The only advantage in introducing degrees is if we should be able to

measure and compare them. But we cannot do that always. In Lascelles Abercrombie the notion of degree is also the determining factor.

Now the faculty of Fancy does not exist : it is one of Coleridge's chimeras, of which he kept a whole stable. Fancy is nothing but a degree of Imagination : and the degree of it concerns, not the quality of the imagery, but the quality and force of the emotion symbolized by the imagery. <sup>50</sup>

In more recent times F. L. Lucas characterizes Coleridge's classification as barren. To him it is altogether unnecessary to assume two distinct faculties. The two words—fancy and imagination—may have acquired a difference in common speech but it is difficult to state the difference precisely. •Imagination may have many levels of complexity but so may have fancy. The so-called 'links of relevance' should not be regarded as the peculiar distinguishing feature of imagination. Moreover, simplicity or absence of 'consilience and reverberations' <sup>51</sup> may be more covetable than ingenuity. The respect for complexity in detail, for a continual imaginative pressure within character and image is less acceptable than the beauty of simplicity. Moreover, Coleridge's distinction, according to Lucas, does not work with literature. <sup>52</sup>

Similarly T. S. Eliot does not consider Coleridge's distinction useful. He comments :

If, as I have already suggested, the difference between imagination and fancy amounts in practice to no more than the difference between good and bad poetry, have we done more than take a turn round Robin Hood's barn ? It is only if fancy can be an ingredient in good poetry, and if you can show some good poetry which is the better for it ; it is only if the distinction illuminates our immediate preference of one poet over another, that it can be of use to a practical mind like mine. <sup>53</sup>

As far as I know, only three important critics of the modern times—D. G. James, Basil Willey and I. A. Richards—have followed Coleridge in so far as they have glorified imagination as the prime poetic quality. This tendency has aroused suspicion in some quarters. "Imagination" says George Watson, has become "a bravo-word, an indeterminate shout of approbation." <sup>54</sup> The history of such philosophical disagreement makes it exceedingly dubious that this difference can ever be resolved by rational argument.

The distinction today is very much like a magnificent derelict. It is, as Barbara Hardy chooses to call it, "a distinction without difference" <sup>55</sup> She argues that Coleridge is in the position of a man who deduces from the qualitative difference between hot water and steam that there must be a

qualitative difference between the cause of steam and the cause of hot water. Moreover, if fancy and imagination are so different in kind what happens when imagination fails? If it fails to unify may the result not bear a resemblance to the stillborn children of fancy? If the characters and metaphors do not come to life they may be regarded as the fortuitous connections of fancy. Thus we will be unable to discriminate between the success of fancy and the failure of imagination. Coleridge believed that the imagination left its mark wherever it worked. But how can we trace it in the harmonious unity of the poem or play? The imaginative metaphor, according to Coleridge, is complex and the fanciful image connects dissimilar objects by a tenuous link. The fanciful image makes us aware of a simple relationship; the imaginative image has a multiple relevance. It may be argued that if each image has the maximum complexity of reference, the pace of the poem will inevitably be slowed down. Local complexity is not always a virtue. The unity of the whole may well be sacrificed to the warring unities of the separate parts. In Chapter XV of the *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge states that the imaginative image is modified by a "predominant passion." Does this mean that the image so modified will never be playful or incongruous? What about the image in which Lady Macbeth calls on the 'murthering ministers'?

...my keen knife see not the wound it makes,  
Nor Heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,  
To cry 'Hold, hold!'

Here, as throughout the play, the imagery of darkness does not simply suggest a vaguely appropriate setting for crime; it enlists what we know through our sense to give a precise equivalent for the moral action. At the end Lady Macbeth is a sleep-walker in more senses than one—her eyes are open but their senses are shut. The image is modified by a 'predominant passion' but it has all the normal characteristics of fancy.

It seems, then, that no sharp line can be drawn between the fanciful and the imaginative; one fades into the other like colours in the spectrum. Yet an important question may be asked at this stage of our enquiry: if imagination or fancy is used by the modern critic without special reference to Coleridge what certainty has he that any meaning whatever will be conveyed? It may be suggested that we might put Coleridge's distinction to working use and this calls for a much deeper and wider understanding than that exists at present. As far as I know, most modern writers use the term 'imagination' in a distinctly Coleridgean sense. Helen Gardner in *The Limits of Criticism* (1957) writes of the 'imagination power to apprehend the truth and value of experience' (p. 37). Wallace Stevens in *The Necessary Angel* (1960) discusses the role of imagination in arts

and letters and he regards imagination as a value. D. G. James in *Scepticism and Poetry* (1960) is distinctly Coleridgean. There may be many others also.

Moreover, the distinction is of some value to the critic. Are we interested in the nature of poetry and the poetic process? If we are, how will our understanding of the creative process be clarified? No poetic output demonstrates the distinction more strikingly than Coleridge's own. The difference between his three great poems and most of his other verse is so radical that it can be regarded as difference in kind. This can only be accounted for on the supposition that in them he was using powers which lay dormant at other times. P. F. Lowes has shown that in the three great poems the images stored in Coleridge's mind had undergone a chemical change in the well of his subconsciousness whereas elsewhere they are produced by a deliberate effort and rhetorical juxtaposition.

The hostility to the distinction may be explained away as the reaction against I. A. Richards's undue emphasis on what he calls 'consilience and reverberations' (p. 82.). The objections of F. L. Lucas and Barbara Hardy in particular seem to be directed not so much against the distinction itself as against Richards's enunciation. One feels that it is not a useless distinction for it attempts to draw the line between poetry and pseudo-poetry, art and non-art. The absence of an observable difference need not be regarded as a proof of its non-existence. An incapacity on the part of the critic has often led to a blurring of the distinction between fancy and imagination. This is precisely the reason why certain poets continue to float on the life-buoys of academic inflation while others like Dryden and Pope had to pass through doldrums and had to be rescued from oblivion. What was considered fanciful for a hundred years was later found to have been highly imaginative.

The argument that we are unable to discriminate between the success of fancy and the failure of imagination (*EC*, 1, p. 340) is false. The postulate that the distinction fails when the borderline case is in question is not valid. It has been said that since the varying qualities of the same operator produces different effects it is pointless to give names to the extremes. The qualitative difference between hot water and steam may not be due to a qualitative difference between the cause of steam and hot water. On such an argument two major observations can be made. First even if the argument were valid, the naming of extremes might be useful; we mean something, and know what we mean, when we say hot or cold or warm. Secondly the argument is based on the assumption of a single operator, which is what the argument sets out to prove. Only when it is

assumed that fancy and imagination are identical that a maximal intensity of fancy is in some way equivalent to a minimal intensity of imagination. Coleridge would have denied these assumptions and would have denied the existence of borderline cases. The notion of a failure of imagination has no relevance to Coleridge's theory.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Bacon, "Advancement of Learning" in *Great Books of the Western World*, Vol. 30, Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., Chicago, 1952, p. 38.
2. *Leviathan*, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1952, p. 13.
3. J. E. Spingorn, *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, Oxford, 1908, Vol. 2 p. 70.
4. Preface to "Annus Mirabilis" in *The Poems of John Dryden*, Oxford University Press, London, 1956 p. 21.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
6. R. P. Cowl, *The Theory of Poetry in England*, Macmillan, London, 1914, p. 16.
7. Sir William Temple, "Of Poetry" in *The Works of Sir William Temple*, London, 1814, Vol 3, p. 414.
8. *Spectator*, no. 411.
9. Addison, "The Fairy Way of Writing" in *English Critical Essays* (XVI-XVIII centuries), ed. E. D. Jones, Oxford University Press, London, 1943, pp. 304-5.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 318.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 319.
12. "Letters on Chivalry" in E. D. Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 370.
13. Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, ed. J. T. Boulton, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1958, p. 16.
14. J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, J. M. Dent & Sons, London, 1947, p. 222.
15. D. Stewart, *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, London, 1792, pp. 475-479.
16. J. W. Beach, *The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry* Macmillan, New York, 1936, pp. 54-78.
17. *Modern Language Notes*, LXII (1947), pp. 166-173.
18. A. Gerard, *An Essay on Genius*, London, 1774, p. 65.
19. John Bullitt & W. J. Bate, "Distinction between Fancy and Imagination in Eighteenth-Century English Criticism" in *Modern Lang. Notes*, LX (1945), p. 15.
20. *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. E. D. Selincourt, Vol. II, p. 512, thereafter it will be referred to as *Works*.
21. *Works*, II, p. 435.
22. Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1955, Vol. II, p. 146.
23. *Works*, II, p. 438.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 438.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 439-440.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 441.
27. *Biog. Literaria*, ed. Shawcross, Oxford, 1907, Vol. I, p. 62.



28. *Table Talk*, June 23, 1834.
29. *Biog. Lit.* I, p. 194.
30. *Table Talk*, April 20, 1833.
31. Basil Willey, *Nineteenth-Century Studies*, Penguin Books, 1964, p. 22.
32. *Poetry & Prose of William Blake* ed Geoffrey Keynes, The Nonesuch Press, London, 1927, p. 830.
33. *Biog. Lit.*, II, p. 12.
34. *Ibid.*, I, p. 193.
35. *Ibid.*, II, p. 64.
36. T. M. Raysor, *Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism*, J. M. Dent & Sons, 1960, Vol. I, p. 189.
37. I. A. Richards, *Coleridge on Imagination*, Kegan Paul & Co., London, 1934, p. 83.
38. *Biog. Lit.*, II, p. 12.
39. *Works*, II, p. 441.
40. *Biog. Lit.*, I, p. 194. I have not come across any remark by Shelley or Keats to suggest that they were conscious of the distinction between fancy and imagination in the *Biog. Lit.*
41. Leigh Hunt, *Imagination and Fancy*, Smith Elder & Co., 1871, p. 26.
42. J. S. Mill, *Dissertations and Discussions*, Vol. I, John Parker & Sons Ltd, London, 1859, pp. 353-54.
43. Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, George Allen, Kent, 1885, Vol. II, pp. 78-9.
44. "The Descent of Man" in *Great Books of the Western World*, Vol. 49, Encyclopaedia Britannica, London, 1952, p. 292.
45. W. Pater, "Wordsworth" in *Appreciations*, Macmillan, 1944, p. 36.
46. Richards, *op. cit.*, pp. 39-41. Richards states that "Pater's is amateur's work, mere nugatory verbiage—empty, rootless and backgroundless postulation." (P. 41) He argues that "we cannot measure the intensity of perceptions, because, if we separate a perception from its causes and consequences, its conditions and its repercussions, at all carefully, we can give no interpretation to its intensity." (p. 41)
47. Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu*, Constable & Co., London, 1927, p. 103.
48. From *Hudibras* (Part II. c2. v29.) and referred to in *Table Talk*, June 23, 1834.
49. Richards, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
50. L. Abercrombie, *The Idea of Great Poetry*, Martin Secker, London, 1926, p. 58.
51. Richards, *op. cit.*, p. 82.
52. F. L. Lucas, *The Decline and Fall of the Romantic Ideal*, Cambridge, 1936, pp. 162-180.
53. T. S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, Faber & Faber Ltd., 1948, p. 77.
54. *Essays in Criticism*, 1953, III, p. 212.
55. *Essays in Criticism*, 1951, I, pp. 336-344.

## YEATS FROM A PERSONAL ANGLE

---

AMALENDU BOSE

I must request the readers of this Journal to bear with me for considering an aspect of W. B. Yeats from my personal angle, hoping that the angle may strike some readers as something more than merely personal.

I came to know Yeats first when I was at school several decades ago. There was a copy of the English *Gitanjali* in our house ; turning to it in curiosity, I read through the introduction written by Yeats. The flowing rhythm of the prose enchanted me (it does not any more now, for I have long outgrown my early liking for the perfume and preciousness of some of the late Victorian prose writers) and I particularly loved the lines describing Tagore's elder brother, Dwijendranath Tagore, up whose knees squirrels used to climb and on whose arms birds used to alight. Later, I learnt a little more of Yeats from some Tagore-writing on him. Presently, I read a few poems by this Irish writer in an anthology and memorized 'Down by the Sally Gardens' and 'I'll arise etc.' ; the poems came close to my sensibilities, such as they were in that early teen age. Perhaps Indians respond to poetry far more spontaneously and easily than many other people. To me the poems seemed to offer glimmerings of a more than human world seeking to break through the objective and concrete, a world that somehow corresponded to my appraisal of my own world ; the words alone were of another language. Nearly twenty years later, I had an opportunity of visiting the Yeats country, Sligo, where Yeats was born, and, down in Galway, Coole, where the poet lived in Thoor Ballylee. The isle of Innisfree in Lough Gill strongly reminded me of the marshes of East Bengal and, slowly paddling a small boat, listening at times to the shrill liquid desire-laden screams of sea-gulls, I felt as if I were back in my own country.

Meanwhile, I had read through Yeats's works, more or less carefully, and read also some relevant critical assessments. I began increasingly to understand Yeats's Irish background and his relation to 19th century romanticism and symbolism and also to certain elements of Platonic and mystical thought that penetrate his writings. In Yeats criticism, I was struck by the curious fact that whereas all Indian scholars found an Indian element in Yeats's poetry and thought this was a significant and important element (some found in it the key element), English and

American critics (I am not familiar with any continental criticism on Yeats) either brushed this element aside or relegated it to a dim corner. Consider just two of the many books on Yeats that exist: *Scattering Branches* edited by the poet's friend, Stephen Gwynne, in 1940, within a year of the poet's death. It is a collection of essays by such friends of the poet as Maud Gonne, Rothenstein, Lennox Robinson, F. G. Fay, Edmund Dulac, F. R. Higgins. The other book, also a collection of essays, is dated 1965, the centenary year, compiled by two academics, containing articles by other academics such as Northrop Frye, T. R. Henn, John Holloway. In neither of the books can I find any recognition of the Indian element in Yeats, far less an examination of the significance of this element. In spite of a few, very few, scholars such as Norman Jeffares (though he does not include a single 'Indian' poem in his Scholar's Library selections containing as many as 180 poems) and Richard Ellmann, most Western critics attach little meaning to Yeats's Indian interests. In this matter, I began to feel, my Indian friends are right seeing that (a) there are poems and plays of Yeats—from 'Anashuya and Vijaya' through 'Meru' and 'Mohini Chatterjee', to *The Herne's Egg*—that are either directly or obliquely fruits of some Indian inspiration, and (b) Yeats experienced vital contacts with several Indians, with Mohini Chatterjee in early life, with Rabindranath Tagore in the middle period, with Shri Purohit Swami in his late sixties; and in between with many others including 'a man named Mallik', as Dr. Mokashi-Punekar puts it in his *The Later Phase*, p. 250, obviously unable to identify the Indian who was a remarkable philosopher named Basanta Mallik, friend of Robert Graves and well-known to Yeats, Middleton Murry and Bertrand Russell (see W. Y. Elliott's essay in *Basanta K. Mallik*, London, p. 133)

The problem for me was, have we, the Indian students of Yeats, tended to find more meaning in his association with Indians than there actually is? Perhaps underneath our scholarly unearthing of all such documents that attest to the poet's Indian interests, there has been a deep-seated desire to satisfy our national self-love, a persistent wish to feel that after centuries of vague allusions to romantic and legendary India in Western literature from *The Suppliant Women* of Aeschylus to Kipling's *Kim*, the land that continued to be called 'the golden Ind' till the times of Milton, we had at long last met in this Anglo-Irish writer a poet who had drunk deep of the fountain of Indian lore and had transmuted the drink into creative art. All my friends of my own nationality constantly referred me to the poem 'Mohini Chatterjee', a poem that I must quote here in full to establish my point:

I asked if I should pray,  
But the Brahmin said,

'Pray for nothing, say  
 Every night in bed,  
 "I have been a king,  
 I have been a slave,  
 Nor is there anything,  
 Fool, rascal, knave,  
 That I have not been,  
 And yet upon my breast  
 A myriad heads have lain." '

That he might set at rest  
 A boy's turbulent days  
 Mohini Chatterjee  
 Spoke these, or words like these.  
 I add in commentary,  
 'Old lovers yet may have  
 All that time denied—  
 Grave is heaped on grave  
 That they be satisfied—  
 Over the blackened earth  
 The old troops parade,  
 Birth is heaped on birth  
 That such cannonade  
 May thunder time away,  
 Birth-hour and death-hour meet,  
 Or, as great sages say,  
 Men dance on deathless feet.'

I enjoy and admire this poem which has made some use of the Yama-Naciketa dialogue of the *Katha Upanishad*. And yet I cannot overlook the fact that this is a singularly poor use of the dialogue. Of course, it is possible that the theosophical preacher Mohini Chatterjee himself had a dim understanding of the *Katha*, or that even if he had understood the dialogue, he had some purpose (not known to us) in conveying only its half meaning to the poet. In any case, the Mohini Chatterjee of the poem is no more than a *persona*, one of the many *personae* that Yeats in his later poetry had devised out of his memories of his relatives, friends, acquaintances (e. g., Robert Gregory, Alfred Pollexfen, James Connolly and John MacBride, Iseult Gonne and Constance Markiewicz), and the words that Yeats puts into the mouth of Mohini Chatterjee are the words of a *persona*. Dr Naresh Guha has rightly said ( *W. B. Yeats : an Indian approach*, p. 34 ) that "with the passing of years Mohini Chatterjee

became Yeats's symbol for Indian abstract thinking which he had learnt to reject." Dr Guha further refers to the account of Mohini Chatterjee's visit for the information that Yeats, after many revisions, published as 'The Pathway' in the eighth volume of the 1908 *Collected Works*. This interesting account tells us that the brahmin taught the poet and his friends that "those who die, insofar as they imagined beauty or justice, are made part of that beauty or justice and move the minds of living men, as Shelley believed ; and that mind overshadows mind even among the living and by pathways that lie beyond the senses" (op. cit., 34). This is a curious amalgam of Shelley and the legend of the second birth as a stag of King Bharata as narrated in *Srimad Bhagavatam* and the *Vishnu Purana*. I have no space here to enter into an elaborate examination of the actual Mohini Chatterjee's knowledge and understanding of the Upanishads (nor, I fear, do we have enough and reliable materials for such an examination), but the *persona* Mohini Chatterjee had clearly bungled the meaning of the legends that he talked about. As I see it, the Yeats-Mohini *persona* just did not understand the Yama-Naciketa dialogue. In the *Katha Upanishad*, Yama, in order to deflect the mind of the boy Naciketa from the thought of self-knowledge, from the questions of the existence of the soul, throws tempting offers of worldly and fleshly pleasures before him.

Ye ye kāmā durlavā martya-loke  
 sarvān kāmānschhandata prārthayasva  
 imā rāmā sarathā saturyā  
 na hidrshā lambhaniyā manushyai  
 ābhirmatprattābhih paricārayasya  
 Naciketo maranam māhanuprākshi

(Ask of me all those gifts that are the most desirable and rare on earth. These pleasure-giving women that are before you, the courtesans of paradise, seated on their chariots and equipped with musical instruments, are not available to mankind, but take them as my gifts to you ; have your pleasure of them, but ask not questions on the subject of death.) [My translation]

Yeats turns these words of temptation into poetry but, it is important for us to note this, stops there. Is the temptation the point of the Yama-Naciketa dialogue ? Is the cycle of birth and life the objective of the Aryan Man ? On the contrary, is not the Aryan Seeker's dauntless quest beyond the cycle of birth and death, above lust and indulgence of the senses, to a state of self-realization beyond time and space, and does not

therefore, the Seeker discipline himself to ruthless renunciation ? Why does not Yeats-Chatterjee at all mention the sublime reply of Naciketa ?

Shvobhāvā martyasya yadantakaitat  
 sarvendriyānām jarayanti tejah  
 api sarvam jivitamalpameva  
 tavaiva bāhāstava nrtyagite  
 Na vittena tarpaniyo manushyo  
 lapsyāmahe vittamadrākshma cet tva  
 jivishyāmo yāvadishishyasi tvam,  
 varastu me varaniya sa eva

(O Yama, in whom all things end, there is no certainty that the pleasures you describe will endure till tomorrow ; the energy of the senses wears out and life in everything is limited. You keep your offer of chariot and song and dance to yourself. Man can never be content with riches. Riches will come to me, if I desire them, because I have had the privilege of seeing you, and I shall live too under your law, but the gift I prayed for remains unaltered.) [My translation]

The verse 'Na vittena tarpaniyo manushyo' is one of the noblest uttered by mortal man—the human soul's ablutions are not performable with gold—and the Aryan Seeker has constantly aimed at transcending material wealth. His path therefore has always been the path of renunciation. The *Katha Upanishad* becomes meaningless or of grievously limited meaning if a reader looks to the earlier verses—Yama's offers—and neglects the later—Naciketa's reply. Without this profoundly renunciatory reply of Naciketa, Yama's temptation stands in a vacuum, becomes pointless. One does not stop with Christ's agony in Gethesemane or with the assault of Māra on Gotama's meditation ; one must take account of the rounded whole comprising agony and triumph. In limiting himself to the possibility of a life-cycle endlessly repeating the process of sensual pleasure, in failing to realise that the Indian concept of birth-death-birth cycle is not an end in itself but a means to an ultimate transcendence over the cycle, Yeats has written a nice fancy poem but it is not Indian in theme. We have no right, as readers of poetry, to demand of the poet any conformity to an idea or even a fact that might have, initially, moved his imagination. Who shall say that because Yeats had associated with some philosophical Indians, and because he himself too had read some works of philosophy or theosophy ( although I find everything about Yeats's reading of Indian books quite dubious, the theosophical material, the guides who set him on the track of Indian

'philosophy', and his own understanding), because Yeats was attracted to some concepts that he believed to be Indian, that he must present us with text-book conformity in his poetry? Indeed, I find Yeats's actual deviation from the sources of his own choice far more revealing than any hypothetical conformity. The wind bloweth where it listeth. The poet finds a meaning in his theme as he pleases.

The poet has this liberty. But does the critic have it too? Are we, the Indian students of Yeats, quite justified in highlighting the Indian element in the poet's work? That is the question that I have been asking for some time and still ask.

At this point of my enquiry, I find a paragraph in Joseph Hone's biography of the poet very interesting. This paragraph reports a meeting and a conversation between the poet and an Indian visitor. Curiously, this report does not figure in the first edition of Hone's biography (1943) but is added in the second edition of 1962, prepared by some unknown person (at least not known to me) after Hone's death, on the basis of the notes collected but not used by Hone himself. Richard Ellmann found these notes in Hone-manuscripts preserved in the National Library of Dublin and made use of them. The paragraph in the second edition of Hone (pp. 458-459) mentions the visit of one Professor Bose to the Yeats home 'Riversdale'; mentions Yeats's exclamation that Tagore wrote "too much about God" and that he himself resented the "vagueness of all such references", that he had fed upon the philosophy of the Upanishads all his life, that he found "an absence of tragedy in Indian poetry", that his message to India was an "insistence on the antinomy" and that he shouted "Conflict, more conflict".

These jerky statements occurring in Hone make the reader suspect their reliability. And indeed the paragraph is not quite reliable. The Indian visitor referred to is Professor Abinas Chandra Bose who did a research work in Dublin and taught English for many years in Kolhapur. Dr Bose's essay, 'W. B. Yeats: his last Indian visitor', published in a Delhi magazine (*Shakti*, June 1966, a copy of which he kindly sent to me), gives a full report of the conversation. This report, as Dr Bose rightly says (*Shakti*, November, 1966), comes from "the only surviving member of the party" which consisted of the poet, the Indian visitor and a Dublin professor, Dr W. F. Trench, and is therefore a useful corrective to the Hone report. In Dr Bose's account, Yeats's statements acquire some cohesion and a natural progression of thought which are wholly lacking in the Hone report. In this account, Yeats's reference to Tagore is not as hostile as in the other, his other statements too are less aggressive, but the basic views remain the same as in the truncated earlier report. I find it difficult to understand Yeats's charge of 'vagueness' in Tagore's

religious poetry which he contraposes to the "clear logical expression", the quality of "the intellect" of his own poetry. In the first place, I do not see how Yeats's later poetry (its athletic precision and all that) and Tagore's *Gitanjali* can be compared. Tagore's own later poetry attains to an amazing degree of precision and verve in both thought and diction, but, of course, I would not expect Yeats to have a direct knowledge of that since he did not read Bengali and also since nearly all English renderings of Tagore's poetry (till a few years ago) were incompetent and misleading. I find no evidence that Yeats was aware of the complex evolution of Tagore's mind and art *after Gitanjali*, just as I do not find any evidence of his awareness of any other contemporary Indian poetry, not even the poetry of Iqbal. But secondly, I wonder how Yeats could complain of 'vagueness' in a poetry of surrender to God. If one does not like religious poetry, that is another matter. But if one reads some poetry knowing that its theme is the soul's surrender to God, what matters is the emotion of the surrender; one cannot expect either the emotion or the deity to be concrete and defined.

I shall not however stress this Yeats criticism of Tagore. In the history of literary friendship, friends have criticised one another: let us remember Ben Jonson on Shakespeare, and Coleridge on Wordsworth. It is not the objective meaning of the criticism but its subjective import that is truly significant. When Yeats complains of the absence of tragedy in Indian poetry, one notes the poverty of the statement as a piece of criticism coming from a person who does not seem to have any awareness of the *Mahabharata* (not to mention other works) and has perhaps based his conclusion on inadequate reading of Berridale Keith's or Macdonnell's histories of Sanskrit literature. At the same time, this statement is vastly important as an additional evidence of Yeats's constant preoccupation with tragic art. For the student of Yeats, this subjective meaning of the statement is far greater than its objective value. This conversation, as I understand it, opens up a vista of Yeats's Yeatsism (if I may be permitted the term) rather than of his Indianism. And further, his passion for antinomy and conflict which led him for a short while to a misappraisal of Fascism, is an integral part of his concept of history and his heroic ideal of life based as much on the ancient Irish myths as on the heroic personalities thrown up by contemporary Ireland. Tagore and India, India's past literature and present political turmoil, constituted for him an antinomy to his own beliefs (not quite as intellectual as he claimed them to be). Even the Upanishads which, he said, he had 'fed upon', have not contributed to much meaningful element in his poetry. True, he went again and again to India but he was not intellectually



equipped for profit from these journeys in the sense that Coleridge and Eliot were. His feeding upon the Upanishads was adulterated with theosophy in early life so that he did justice to neither the one nor the other, and in the later phase he got involved in Tantricism, a difficult study. Some Indian scholars have examined Yeats's works with admirable care and acumen to indicate the relation between the poet and certain aspects of Indian thought ; their studies shed new light on several images and symbols and on certain streaks of thought and theme. To my mind, Yeats went again and again to India because, like Blake whom he admired, he was unable to conform to the church tradition into which he was born. He ranged far and near, from European esotericism to the Eastern, in search of an intellectual framework for his emotive and imaginative response to life which he sought to dramatise in aesthetic terms. The mind of the poet Yeats was a piece of platinum ; the Indian element, like several other elements, became converted to something very different from its original meaning. And this is as it should have been in the creative process of a great poet.

NEW SERIES

VOL. V NO. II

1969-70

**BULLETIN**  
**OF**  
**THE DEPARTMENT**  
**OF**  
**ENGLISH**



**CALCUTTA UNIVERSITY**

BULLETIN  
OF  
THE DEPARTMENT  
OF  
ENGLISH



NEW SERIES

VOL. V : NO II

1969-70

EDITED BY  
AMALENDU BOSE



CALCUTTA UNIVERSITY

EDITED BY AMALENDU BOSE AND PUBLISHED  
BY SIBENDRANATH KANJILAL, SUPERINTENDENT  
CALCUTTA UNIVERSITY PRESS.

THE BULLETIN of the Department of English, Calcutta University.  
*Annual Subscription*: Inland: Rs. 5.00 (inclusive of Postage)  
Foreign: 13s. (inclusive of Postage) *Single Copy*: Inland:  
Rs. 2.50 (exclusive of Postage) Foreign: 6s. 6d. (exclusive  
of Postage).

PRINTED BY SURAJIT C. DAS, AT GENERAL PRINTERS  
AND PUBLISHERS PRIVATE LIMITED, AT THEIR WORKS  
ABINAS PRESS, 119 DHARAMTALA STREET, CALCUTTA-13

## CONTENTS

---

THE FAILURE OF HUMANISM: A STUDY OF THE STRUCTURE OF E. M. FORSTER'S A PASSAGE TO INDIA ..	1
A. K. Chanda	
SHAKESPEARE CRITICISM IN BENGAL ... ..	21
K. Lahiri	
MEREDITH'S USE OF THIRD-PERSON DRAMATIZED NARRATION ...	45
Amitabha Sinha	
IVY COMPTON-BURNETT: A PERSPECTIVE ... ..	56
B. K. Tripathy	
MODERN ASSESSMENT OF ROMANTIC POETS : A STUDY IN THE WHIRLIGIG OF TASTE . . . . .	61
P. K. Saxena	

## OUR CONTRIBUTORS

A. K. CHANDA, M.A. (Cantab.) is on the postgraduate department of English, Mysore University.

K. LAHIRI: Reader, Department of English, Calcutta University.

AMITABHA SINHA, M.A., D.Phil. (Cal) Lecturer, Kalyani University.

B. K. TRIPATHY, M.A., D. Phil (Cal) teaches in Ravenshaw College, Cuttack.

P. K. SAXENA, M.A. Ph. D. (Lucknow) Reader in English, Lucknow University.

# THE FAILURE OF HUMANISM—A STUDY OF THE STRUCTURE OF E.M. FORSTER'S *A PASSAGE TO INDIA*

---

A. K. CHANDA

It is well known that in all his novels Forster combines social comedy with 'a poetic communication about life'.<sup>1</sup> Unlike Jane Austen who restricted her art to domestic comedy, he 'tried to hitch it on to other things'.<sup>2</sup> Where Jane Austen (touching the boundaries of her art) ventures to talk about 'a *principle* of separation' reigning among the groups on Box Mill, Forster, when describing Aziz's mundane troubles in organising the picnic to the Marabar Hills, sums up, with a smooth shift of tone, by attributing them all to 'the *spirit* of the Indian earth, which tries to keep men in compartments'. (*italics mine*) But what has not been examined satisfactorily is the exact relationship between Forster's 'tea-tabling manner' and the 'other things'. Take for example Frederick C. Crews's analysis of the following passage (extended a little at the beginning) :

'There was silence when he had finished speaking, on both sides of the court ; at least more ladies joined the English group, but their words seemed to die as soon as uttered. Some kites hovered overhead, impartial, over the kites passed the mass of a vulture, and with an impartiality exceeding all, the sky, not deeply coloured but translucent, poured light from its whole circumference. It seemed unlikely that the series stopped here. Beyond the sky must not there be something that overarches all the skies, more impartial even than they ? Beyond which again...'

*Crews's comments* : 'Here the importance of man is qualified not only by the predatory kites and vultures, suggesting death, but more horribly by the concentric spheres of "impartiality", that is of divine indifference to the human world'.<sup>3</sup> This interpretation, although not incorrect, ignores the context and the development and tone of the passage. Ronny has just finished a vicious tirade against the Indians invited to the 'Bridge Party'. The Indians, who are standing on the other side of the garden, are uneasy and cowed, while the English carry on echoing conversations,

such as the one between Ronny and Mrs. Turton in which Ronny either deferentially agrees with the Collector's wife or gets her to agree with him. In this context the resulting silence is the mark of a social or human void. The tone changes, becomes uncanny ( 'their words seemed to die as soon as uttered' ), draws the eye to the sinister, because impartial, kites and vulture and the appallingly indifferent sky. The movement up is gradual and inevitable. What it suggests is that the feeling of inadequacy about human beings and their relations which arises out of such a bankruptcy in social relations compels man to become oppressively aware of his horrifying relationship to a dull, impartial colourless infinity, which makes him feel insignificant and yet gives him no sense of mystery. In other words, when man's faith in human solidarity breaks down he becomes open in India to intimations of death ( as symbolised by the kites and vulture ) and metaphysical despair. In England man can turn to nature when depressed by such an inadequacy, to 'romantic and manageable' Grasmere for instance, and seek solace or inspiring awe. But India forbids such romance. The relationship between the two poles of Forster's art is thus a dynamic one, and not, as Crews postulates, one of mere juxtaposition of humanity and infinity as a result of which man in his normal condition of self-sufficiency begins to feel dwarfed by phenomena larger than himself. Not that the kind of static relationship Crews describes never occurs. But it is rare, and only found in the effect of irresistible natural forces, such as heat, on man.

This dynamic connection between social comedy and poetry is not only important for particular scenes ; it governs both the horizontal and vertical structures of the first two parts of the novel. The horizontal structure can be summarised as follows : the increasing chaos in personal relations in the first two sections builds up to, in fact, causes, Adela's and Mrs. Moore's traumatic experience of muddledom in the Marabar caves, which in turn produces a disruption in personal relations all round. Considered vertically, the structure consists of the caves and their echo overarching humanism, Christianity and Islam, civilisations which embody the possibility of social comedy. The third section of the novel gives an extension and a greater depth to the poetic communication of life. Its function in the horizontal structure consists of temporarily patching up broken relationships, in the vertical structure, of overarching the cave section and resolving its despairing dilemmas. J

The aim of this paper is to arrive at a comprehensive interpretation of *A Passage to India* through its structure. The first part of the paper will describe and analyse the social comedy and poetry separately, and then consider the dialectics of their connection. The second part will



study the way in which Forster constructs the relationship between the Mau section and the rest of the novel.

In the eyes of the Westerner, India presents in her national character and scene an image of comprehensive muddle. As such she challenges the Western man's Hellenistic values of rationalism, clarity, individualism, moderation, form, beauty and good taste, and his Renaissance conception of the universe as man-centred. Forster's novel examines the impact of India on Western humanism, and to a lesser extent on Christianity, an impact beautifully symbolised by the accident to the Nawab Bahadur's car (a product of the West), when some vague, unknown, unidentifiable, unspeakable object (animal or ghost?) collides with it: "Steady and smooth ran the marks of the car, ribbons neatly nicked with lozenges, then all went mad. Certainly some external force had impinged..."

I shall first consider the muddle in personal relations between the English and the Indians, the English and English, the Hindus and Muslims, and Hindus and Hindus. (We see little conflict among the Muslims, for reasons I shall discuss later.) The latter two antagonisms needn't concern us for long. The Hindu-Muslim hostility is seen to be one of the facts of India, like its hot season. Even when there is an *entente* it is typified by a 'half-embrace' between Das and Aziz. The divisions among the Hindus are multifarious and kaleidoscopic and they are typical of India in having nothing fixed or rigid about them. The main conflicts in the book are the former two, which Forster uses to dramatise a class in values. But before going on to this, I should make one thing clear about the English. It is not to be supposed that the English acquired their characteristics, whether good or bad, in India. India just brings them out into the open. For instance, Forster observes that many of their public school characteristics flourish in India "more vigorously than (they) can yet hope to in England".

The public school character, never very flexible, becomes rigid and petrified under 'a tropic sky'. Most of the English become dehumanised. The arid untidiness and amorphousness of India contrast with the 'arid tidiness' of the grid-iron of bungalows, all the same, which comprises the civil station. The flat uniformity of the colonialists ('... Turton or Burton. It is only the difference of a letter') contrasts with Aziz's mercurial individuality and Godbole's impersonality and elusiveness. The Englishman's life has hardened into conventions because they have a greater force in India where there is no privacy than in England. Aziz also lives within conventions, but conventions which, since they belong to a living tradition, are his life-source and the medium of his self-expression.

This dehumanisation takes several forms, including philistinism, hatred

of ideas, because they encourage free-thinking, the propensity to label everything (Ronny assures Adela that the Marabar Caves would 'be numbered in sequence with white paint') and racialism, based on the herd instinct, which contrasts with Aziz's passionate 'All men are my brothers' and Godbole's enlightened internationalism. But the 'most important form it assumes is the Englishman's official attitude. When Ronny 'drops in' (note the ironical ambiguity) at Fielding's tea-party he completely ignores Aziz and Godbole. Forster points out that Ronny 'did not mean to be rude to the two men, but the only link he could be conscious of with an Indian was the official and neither happened to be his subordinate.' Feeling insulted, Aziz becomes impertinent to Ronny—'here was an Anglo-Indian', he reflects, 'who must become a *man* before comfort could be regained'. (italics mine) The official attitude even infects the most intimate spheres of the Englishman's life. For instance Ronny had only a dim idea of what was passing through Adela's mind after the cave-incident, 'for where there is officialism every human relationship suffers'.

Needless to say people like Ronny are shown up not only by the standards of the East but also by the standards of Western humanism. Fielding's manifesto 'I believe in teaching people to be individuals and to understand other individuals' is totally ill-suited to the English at Chandrapore.

The colonialist's dehumanisation is accelerated by his 'undeveloped heart', which creates a gulf between himself and the Indian with his emotionalism and his capacity and thirst for affection. Early in the novel Forster talks about 'the shifting tides of emotion which alone can bear the voyager to an anchorage, but may also carry him across it on to the rocks'. Most of the English don't possess this key—they are mere 'shore dwellers who can only understand stability and suppose that every ship must be wrecked'. Their attitude to Indians is not softened by even 'one touch of regret'. It is true that Fielding is capable of great warmth, sincerity, and frankness in personal relations; Mrs. Moore is for our purposes half Oriental. He embodies the finest ideals of the civilisation of personal intercourse. For him what is important in a man is his 'essential life', not his superficial analysable traits. But compared to the Indians even Fielding appears to be a victim of the undeveloped heart. Talking with Aziz at his most lyrical 'he felt old. He wished that he too could be carried away on waves of emotion'. (Note how Forster continues the sea metaphor). He thinks 'I shall not really be intimate with this fellow . . . nor with any one.' He has achieved clarity and poise at the expense of emotional spontaneity.

This emotional coolness also impoverishes the Englishman's most

intimate relationships. On the maidan just after Fielding's party this is how Adela announces her decision to Ronny not to marry him.

"'It's something different...I wanted to talk over with you', she gazed at the colourless grass. 'I've finally decided we're not going to be married, my dear boy'."

This is a good example of Forster's precise ambivalence. Adela's relative emotional detachment enables them to discuss their problem 'frankly and coolly', something the Indians around them certainly couldn't have done. But concomitant with this detachment is a certain flatness and dryness of tone, the more strikingly inadequate at such a critical juncture. Forster deftly suggests how devoid of passion and tension their relationship is by his reference to 'the colourless grass'.

The Indians on the other hand put a high premium on affection and kindness, on the emotions generally. Aziz pleads with Fielding 'no one can ever realise how much kindness we Indians need'. His sole political credo is 'We can't build up India except on what we feel'. Emotions are the governing force in Aziz's life—'until his heart was involved he knew nothing'.

The obverse of the Englishman's undeveloped heart is his rational, practical-minded sane and moderate attitude to life; the obverse of the Indian's emotionalism is his irrational, dreamy, unpractical and extremist nature. This contrast has several aspects.

The Englishman's pursuit of justice and order is ultimately futile in India because mere 'justice never satisfied (Indians)'. Hence their cold response to Adela's courageous sacrifice—they realise it does not include her heart. Admittedly Aziz's remarkable jaunt to the caves is a practical success. But this is the exception that proves the rule. Aziz is inspired by affection for Mrs. Moore and Fielding.

In personal relations the English are ruled by their heads. The theoretical Adela is a typical product of a liberal, intellectual, feminist upbringing. Her attitude to life is conscious, and moral action is for her a matter of earnest calculations. But she comes to realise that in the world of human relations two plus two don't always make four: 'I can do this right, and that right, but when the two are put together they come wrong'. This is especially true with Indians. What Forster writes about his experience with the Maharajah of Dewas could equally be applied to Fielding's relations to Aziz: 'Quite often I did not understand him—he was too incalculable—but it was possible with him to reach a platform where calculations were unnecessary. It would not be possible with an Englishman'.<sup>4</sup>

The Englishman's intellectualism, his proneness to analyse, generalise

and compare leaves the Indian cold. Fielding's elaborate letter to Aziz—a dispassionate analysis of himself—written, Forster notes with irony, 'in the rather modern style' hurts the latter's delicacy. 'He liked confidences, however gross, but generalisations and comparisons always repelled him. Life is not a scientific manual'. Aziz's mind is only on firm ground with emotions, and his capacity for sustained rational thinking is limited. This is natural in a man whose subconscious plays such an active role in his life. We're told for instance that he does not change his mind, 'it change(s) itself'.

The Englishman's capacity for generalisation goes hand in hand with a firm grasp of reality. 'Great is information and she shall prevail', Forster writes not without irony. Aziz on the other hand lacks a sense of reality. He is sensitive rather than responsive. 'In every remark he found a meaning, but not always the true meaning, and his life, though vivid, was largely a dream'. What determines his belief is not evidence, but the 'sequence of his emotions'. One such sequence leads him to suspect Fielding of intending to marry Miss Quested for the compensation money he had forfeited. His 'shifting tides of emotion' ultimately carry their relationship on to the rocks.

In India the Englishman finds his sense of proportion undermined. Adela feels that her tactless confession in public about her decision to leave India is somehow due to the fact that she has 'got everything out of proportion'. This confuses her relationship with Ronny. When Aziz refers to the 'dismay and anxiety' he felt on hearing that Fielding's name was now being linked to Miss Quested's, Fielding objects, '...the scale, the scale. You always get the scale wrong'. No wonder that Fielding's cards from Hellenistic Italy strike his Indian friends as cold.

Finally we come to the Englishman's spiritual limitations, which stem from his assumption that rationalism is adequate to cope with and explain all life's complexities. Just after Adela and Fielding neatly round off their discussion on life after death by agreeing that 'the dead can't live again' Forster comments ironically, 'There was a moment's silence such as often follows the triumph of rationalism.'

All the English except Mrs. Moore and her children are spiritually stunted. This of course is the saving of most of them in India. But the degree of spiritual atrophy varies, the touchstone being their response to the caves. Mrs. Moore has an experience which undermines her whole life. Fielding goes into one of the caves but returns unimpressed. Adela's case is interesting for it shows how once, subjected to the pressure of Indian chaos, one of the better products of Western civilisation starts losing her faith in herself and her values, she becomes liable to super-

normal experiences. According to this argument a man like Fielding also has the potential for disintegration and in fact the 'mass of madness' which erupts from the cave incident does put a severe strain on his personality and values. (At the time he visits the caves he has suffered very little from the muddle, much less than either Adela or Mrs. Moore). He fends off chaos and meaningless, but they haunt him for a while in the form of an echo at the edge of his mind. But neither he nor Adela have the apparatus to develop this echo—they can only recover from it. Nevertheless they will now go through life wondering whether instead of developing their personalities along the best European lines they 'ought (not) to have been working at something else the whole time'.

Ronny and the other sahibs are 'totally blind spiritually. Forster indicates this in subtle ways. 'Going to the veranda, he (Ronny) called firmly to the moon. His *sais* answered, and without lowering his head he ordered his trap to be brought round'. In calling so officially and confidently to the moon Ronny betrays a complete insensitivity to phenomena and forces larger than himself. We're also made to feel that this insensitivity issues out of, or at least is intimately associated with, his arrogance towards the natives.

The spiritual limitations of the English inevitably make it difficult for them to get on with Indians, especially Hindus. Fielding briefly dismisses the Hindus: 'I never really understood or liked them, except an occasional scrap of Godbole'. Muslims are found to be more spiritually developed. The Nawab's belief about the ghost is 'a racial secret communicable more by blood than speech'. (Mrs. Moore shares this racial secret). Although Aziz condemns this belief as a superstition, he himself has what Forster calls a 'semi-mystic... overturn of the mind'. But his mysticism is more poetical, aesthetic and emotional than truly spiritual. He is above all mystical about friendship. After all, the Persian expression for God also means the Friend. This is why he casts an aura around Mrs. Moore, and whenever her name is mentioned is uncannily stirred. Aziz's 'elaborate chivalry' over Mrs. Moore (Fielding's expression) is another characteristic in the friend that Fielding finds difficult to come to terms with.

From the foregoing analysis it will be clear that the basic contrast is that between the chaotic, variable, contradictory Indian character, which nevertheless has an underlying harmony depending on the logic and force of emotion, and the English character, which has a harmony depending on reason and form. The stresses and strains in personal relations are an inevitable outcome of this incompatibility in civilisations. Forster condemns the extremes of emotionalism and rationalism. Otherwise in his exploration of the conflict he maintains a subtly poised moral ambivalence.

Let us now consider the powerful image of the Indian landscape and climate that emerges in the first two books, an image of formlessness, chaos and melancholy dreariness due mainly to the vastness, variety and heat of India.

The rambling Indian plains are so vast that they assume the proportions of infinity. The railway branch lines lead to roads, roads to tracks and tracks to paths which 'fray out into the cultivation, and disappear near a splash of red paint'. The significance of the last phrase becomes clear from the following comment in *The Hill of Devi*: 'The unseen was always close to him (the Maharajah of Dewas) even when he was joking or intriguing. Red paint on a stone could evoke it'.<sup>5</sup> How can the mind, Forster asks, 'take hold of such a country?' Moreover India's sweeping vastness is hostile to the growth of distinct forms. It levels everything to a paltry mediocrity: 'the countryside was too vast to admit of excellence'.

Paradoxically, the very variety of India wipes out distinctions between forms. Egypt is a relief to Fielding's eyes—'a green strip of carpet and walking up and down it four sorts of animals and one sort of man'. But India proliferates so many kinds and there are such infinite gradations that 'nothing in India is identifiable, the mere asking of a question causes it to disappear or merge into something else'. Concentric circles recede both outwards so that after a while humanity itself grades and drifts beyond the educated vision, and later still animate matter merges gradually into inanimate matter and upwards, so that the colourlessness of infinity seems close and the closest vault of blue partakes of infinity.

The cruel Indian sun is hostile to form, beauty and poetry unlike the Mediterranean sun which is the source and subject of poetry and whose light is an indispensable accompaniment to form. In the Indian sun's 'yellow-white overflow not only matter, but brightness itself lay drowned'. The terrible heat drives people to the interior of their bungalows where they can 'recover their self-esteem and the qualities that distinguished them from each other'. It prevents human beings from thinking clearly—'the procession' of Adela's plans 'passed before her again, blurred by the heat'. As 'the final heat beats up' we are told that 'the country was stricken and blurred. Its houses, trees and fields were all modelled out of the same brown paste'. All over the country 'the triumphant machine of civilisation is immobilised into a car of stone'.

The Marabar hills and caves are the crowning image of the chaos, meaninglessness and nothingness of the Indian scene. As such their function in the novel can be adequately described without reference to Jung, Freud or the Puranas. Godbole at Fielding's tea-party can only describe

them in terms of negatives: 'Are they large caves?'—'No, not large': 'they are immensely holy, no doubt?'—'Oh no, oh no, etc....Forster observes that 'Nothing, nothing attaches to them', thus echoing remarks like Aziz's 'Nothing embraces the whole of India, nothing, nothing'. When Aziz tries to look for Adela he is confronted by a bewildering variety of caves ('caves got behind caves or confabulated in pairs'), so many and so similar that he cannot even distinguish between groups of caves let alone individual ones. Not only do number and variety wipe out distinctions between caves, the caves themselves are forces that obliterate number and variety: 'The small black hole gaped where their (i. e., the sightseers') varied forms and colours had momentarily functioned'. Neither the hills nor the caves have form. The hills 'rise abruptly, insanely without the proportion that is kept by the wildest hills elsewhere, they bear no relation to anything dreamt or seen'. Even the caves with their perfect domes suggest the vault of the heavens, that is the 'roundness' of infinity. The human mind naturally cannot grasp these hills and caves, nor language express them. 'There is something unspeakable about these outposts' and the reputation of the caves 'does not depend upon human speech'.

I have discussed the clash in values and between people, and the Indian landscape, separately and in abstraction from the development of the plot because it is easier by this method to unravel the themes. This method also enables us to see the novel in its organic entity as a dramatic poem or extended metaphor. The metaphor that emerges is one of chaos. It is present in the Indian character and landscape. It takes the form of the disarray in the English ranks and the disturbing confusion in a few of the English. And it is present as a wholesale muddle in personal relations. But unless we consider the structure of the book as a whole (both vertical and horizontal) we shall not be able to understand the relationship between the chaoses.

Now the horizontal structure is determined as I have said by the connection between the strife in personal relations (social comedy) and the effect of the caves (poetry). This connection is established predominantly through the four major episodes in the first two parts—the Bridge party, Fielding's tea-party, the ride in the Nawab's car, and the picnic to the caves, which all look forward in various ways to the caves. All these episodes are attempts to 'bridge the gulf' between the English and Indians and vice-versa, but ironically they only help to widen it, and in addition are responsible for creating rifts between the English. The real significance of the connection between the muddle and the caves is brought out through Mrs. Moore and Adela. It is *because* they suffer disillusionment with personal relations and life generally in India that

they succumb to the echo, which acts as a catalyst transmuting an experience of social confusion into neurosis in one case and spiritual despair in the other. All these four episodes also have a vertical structure in which muddle is again causally related to super-normal experiences.  $\int$

The first episode in the horizontal structure that is linked to the caves is the Bridge Party. Adela does her best to make the Indian ladies talk but she strives against what Forster describes as 'the echoing walls of their civility'. She finds, that is, that talking to these ladies is like conversing with the walls of a cave. Whatever she says is met with deference and agreement. 'She tried doing nothing to see what that produced and they too did nothing'. Distinctions between her remarks therefore became unimportant, ironed out. At the end of their "exchange" a 'shapeless discussion' takes place. Personal relations have become as hollow as a cave and its echo, and as chaotic as the reverberations of an echo in a cave—'echoes generate echoes'.

At Fielding's tea-party the English discuss the mystery or muddle of the Bhattacharya's failure to send their carriage that morning. Aziz comes to the rescue of his country, 'There'll be no muddle when you come to see me'. Remembering with horror how fly-ridden and dirty his bungalow is, he quickly changes the venue to the caves. Thus in order to right one muddle he causes an even greater one. This, however, is an external connection. The actual muddle of the tea-party is linked to the caves by the unconscious irony in Aziz's promise that 'they (the caves) were to be a stupendous replica of the party'.

Apart from the fact that the accident to the Nawab's car, out of which a muddle arises (the Nawab becomes hysterical and rude to Ronny, Adela and his chauffeur), happens on the road to the Marabar caves, as if to suggest that all muddles lead to the caves, the only other link is a retroactive one. As Adela and Aziz toil over the rocks towards the caves, Adela suddenly discovers that she and Ronny don't love one another. This discovery is suggested by some marks on the rocks which remind her of 'the pattern tracked in the dust by the wheels of the Nawab's car', and hence of the accident and her reconciliation with Ronny. She realises that there was no love in that reconciliation—'there was esteem and animal contact at dusk ( but ) the emotion that links them was absent'. And it is while she is pondering over this void in their relationship that she enters the cave and has a hallucination of attempted rape.

In the fourth episode the inability of the three picnickers to quite hit it off contributes to precipitate the crisis in the caves. The two English ladies who are suffering from disillusionment in their private affairs, and who have been existing at 'half-pressure' since they heard Godbole's 'queer



little song' ( nothing would 'bite into her mind' Adela finds ) are somewhat overpowered by Aziz's kindness and hospitality. The practical joke he engineers distresses them. Although at Aziz's mention of their encounter at the mosque Mrs. Moore suddenly becomes 'vital and young', Adela in her decent, non-committed way politely interrupts and breaks the spell. And it is another of her tactless remarks—this time about whether a Muslim can have more than one wife—that sends Aziz, insulted, hurrying into a cave. This breach in their relationship paves the way for the crisis. The implication surely is that if there had been understanding and affectionate harmony among them, the inrush of vitality and happiness they would have felt would have successfully counteracted the effect of the echo.

For the two ladies the catastrophe in the caves is a climax of disillusionment. After the car accident Adela had come to realise that 'there had been a factitious element' in her interest in India. She feels alienated from, even disgusted with Anglo-India. Deep down she is dissatisfied with her relationship with Ronny, since it lacks passion and sexual desire. Her other disappointments seem to bear upon and intensify this one. Her hallucination—' virgin's fancy in a hot country, imagining a rape she secretly desired'<sup>6</sup> as K. W. Gransden puts it—is a backlash of this dissatisfaction. The theme of Adela's repression is developed through the image of 'bottling up'. On the train journey she tells Mrs. Moore how much she resents the idea of being 'bottled up' in the hills in summer. During the elephant ride the atmosphere and the sky oppress her. The caves also are stuffy. This oppressiveness reaches its climax when Adela notices 'this shadow, or sort of shadow, down the entrance tunnel, bottling me up'. She finds violent release from this stifling sensation of repression which becomes focussed in her sexual life, in her hallucination.

Adela's echo, which she finds 'so unimportant intellectually', works at a subconscious level. There is a conflict between the echo and her rational mind, between hysteria and sanity: "There was the 'shock', but what is that? For a time her own logic would convince her, then she would hear the echo again, weep ..' The echo also wipes out distinctions—'People seemed very much alike ..' It comes to stand for the lie ( sexual repression masquerading as sexual assault ) with which she lives. Whenever she comes near to realising the truth, as when in Mrs. Moore's curiously healing presence she momentarily confesses she might have made a mistake about Aziz, her echo gets better. It disappears when in a kind of prosaic counter-trance she sees the truth and has the courage to confess it. As soon as the lie is 'exercised' she becomes readjusted psychologically and once again 'healthily' barred from the super-normal.

Mrs. Moore resembles Indians, especially Hindus, in her non-rational approach to people—'I don't think I understand people very well. I only know whether I like or dislike them'—her capacity for love, so all-embracing that it even alights on a stray wasp, and her super-normal faculties. India produces a sad change in her. When she arrives she is full of Christian tenderness and charity, optimistic about love, marriage and personal relations. She also has the Oriental tendency to resignation, a desire to rest in a mystical union with nature, and thereby transcend the human situation, transcend it not in a spirit of bitterness against mankind, but in a spirit of benign detachment: 'She was caught up in the shawl of night together with earth and all the other stars. A sudden sense of unity, of kinship with the heavenly bodies, passed into the old woman and out like water through a tank, leaving a strange freshness behind'. But tragically a profound depression comes over her gradually as she observes what Anglo-Indians, including her son, have made of themselves and their lives (their club 'stupefies' her), and how they treat Indians. This infects her response to the universe. As she gradually loses her faith in marriage (she notes how half-heartedly Ronny and Adela are drifting into marriage), personal relations and ethical values, such as love between man and woman, the overarching heavens appear to her elderly eyes to become more and more impersonal and indifferent, less and less accommodating to mystery and resignation. Already at Fielding's party she feels a general restlessness—'half-languor, half-excitement'. During the train journey to the caves, overcome by 'a depressed weariness' she comes to feel intensely that though people are important, the relations between them are not'. It is while she is in this condition that the Marabar strikes its gong, and hastens and completes her disintegration! '...the mood of the last two months took definite form at last, and she realised that...she didn't want to communicate with any one, not even with God.' Now even people themselves lose their importance. The echo wipes out all distinction between values—'Pathos, piety, courage—they exist, but are identical and so is filth'—She experiences what Crews calls an antivision in which her mystical tendencies are inverted. In her metaphysical nightmare she sees both 'the horror of the universe and its smallness...at the same time', that is the horror holds no glory, the abyss is petty. The vast, beautiful sky which had held out the hope and solace of infinity now dwindles to the walls of a cave, which take on some of the qualities of the sky. Like the sky the caves are circular and their walls are like 'a mirror inlaid with lovely colours...with delicate shades of pink and grey exquisite nebulae, shadings fainter than the tail of a comet or the midday moon.' Infinity, therefore, becomes enclosed for

Mrs. Moore within the claustrophobic confines of the caves, and filled with self-generating echoes which make complete nonsense of the universe. The mystery of the sky has finally become reduced to the muddle of the caves.

Next the vertical structure of the four major episodes. I have already described the dynamic relationship between social muddle and the overarching sky in the first episode. At the second episode, Fielding's party, the equivalent of the overarching infinity (although with a difference) is Godbole's song, formless, chaotic, colourless: '...the ear baffled repeatedly, soon lost any clue, and wondered in a maze of noises, none harsh or unpleasant, none intelligible .. Only the servants understood it'. The difference is that there is a certain harmony in this divine song, in which man asks God to come to him, which the servants respond to. And the 'Absolute silence' ('No ripple disturbed the water, no leaf stirred') that follows the song is very different from the dead silence arising out of the social strife and stalemate of the Bridge party, or the 'spiritual silence' of the Marabar Valley. Here the silence is a powerful tranquility that swallows up all the crossness and irritation at the end of the party and establishes a mood of perfect peace. Although Adela and Mrs. Moore enjoy the 'haunting song', just about then they begin to live at half-pressure. The song in its formlessness naturally undermines the Western values by which they live. Instead of making them transcend the social situation, the song makes them apathetic, and indifferent to people and relationships. Coming at a time when both are depressed and disillusioned it reinforces this mood. If they had been happy in their relationships it would probably have had no effect on Adela, and helped Mrs. Moore towards that resignation which she desires.

As Adela and Ronny ride along in the Nawab's car through a countryside of 'melancholy fields', so vast (there was not enough god to go round) that it is inferior they 'conversed feebly and felt unimportant'. This response is conditioned by their depression—they have just agreed to break off their engagement.

From the beginning of the trip to the caves there is an atmosphere of disenchantment. The two English ladies who are suffering from apathy and boredom (living 'inside cocoons') peer into the 'timeless twilight' at the 'dull fields', as they are lulled to sleep by the mechanical rhythm of the train's movement—'pomper, pomper, pomper'. As the sky brightens but only to produce a 'false dawn', 'a profound disappointment entered with the morning breeze'. During the listless elephant ride there is a confusion about a snake that is never cleared up. 'Nothing was explained, yet there was no romance'. Moreover 'Films of heat, radiated from the

Kawa Dal precipice, increased the confusion'. In this setting, depressed at their inability to get on well with Aziz and with one another, they feel drearily insignificant (compare Fielding who arrives at the caves full of *joie de vivre*). Just as the echo begins to undermine Mrs. Moore's hold on life she 'looked at the queer valley and their feeble invasion of it. Even the elephant had become a nobody'.

From the study of the vertical and horizontal structures the relation between the chaoses will have become evident. But to recapitulate briefly; the clash between the inchoate Indian character and the rational English character leads to a wholesale muddle in personal relations. The effect of this is most disturbingly felt by Mrs. Moore and Adela who as a result become terrifyingly exposed to the dull confusion of the Indian scene which culminates in the cave and their echo. The incident in the caves which brings to a focus the frictions and tensions of the first two parts in turn brings about the long-expected rupture in relations all round; between the English at the club and the Indians, between Adela and Aziz, between Mrs. Moore and everybody else, between Fielding and his compatriots and eventually between Ronny and Adela and Fielding and Aziz.

Before going on to the Mau section I should like to indicate some of the conclusions to be drawn from Forster's treatment of humanism. Although his attitude to it is characteristically ambivalent he subjects it to a more radical criticism than in his other novels. Compared to Aziz, Fielding and Adela are lacking emotionally and spiritually, a lack India forces them to recognise. Even Aziz's life is inadequate (for example spiritually) but he is not conscious of the inadequacy. Emotionally he and the other Muslims feel rooted in the traditions of Muslim society—the opening scene of the novel is a picture of perfect gregarious harmony and intimacy. It is because the Muslims believe in personal relations (although not in the same way as the English) and live in a traditional society that there is such a feeling of solidarity among them. Spiritually also Aziz feels no deficiency (he is totally impervious to the Marabar echo) because he finds a substitute in his emotional mysticism.

Apart from the inadequacies of humanism, humanistic values themselves are passed through a rigorous test, out of which they emerge with their honour undiminished, but certainly tougher and wiser. The value which is attacked most violently is the central one of personal relationships, which in India are found to be as delicate as a desert flower or 'as local and temporary as the gleam that inhabits a fire-fly'. Although Forster would not agree with Mrs. Moore that 'though people are important, the relations between them are not' he has sympathy with Adela's outburst; 'I feel we ought all to go back into the desert for centuries and try and

get good .. I am not fit for personal relationships'. Personal relations are important but people must first improve.

But Forster does not merely reveal the limitations of humanism and test its values; he also exposes their insignificance and powerlessness when faced with the chaos of the caves. All along the novel there is a suggestion of a higher reach of experience, of a spiritual life which throws into relief the paltry man-centred worldliness of humanism. At the end of Fielding's and Adela's last conversation in India Forster comments: 'A friendliness as of dwarfs shaking hands, was in the air. Both man and woman, were at the height of the powers—sensible, honest, even subtle.' Owing to the caves Fielding's and Adela's confidence in their own values has been so shaken that even though they feel the bond of friendship and are at the height of their powers they feel dwarfed. But they accept their limitations and resolutely devote themselves to the life they are most capable of leading. Herein lies their strength.

The cave episode unmasks the impotence of humanism and Christianity. The Mau section presents a way of life which is felt to be higher because it can resolve the chaos of India, including that of the caves, into a mystery. Love, joy, happiness—the most positive experiences in the book—are found in this section. Admittedly Forster is ambivalent in his attitude towards Hinduism, but it is an ambivalence which is heavily weighted in its favour. Godbonle's ludicrousness for instance does not detract from the ecstasy of his worship. We do not feel that Forster is making fun of him. The emotional sweep of his prose—enacting the frenzy of worship—carries all incongruities along with it. Ludicrousness we are made to feel is also a part of Hinduism. What is remarkable is how the facetious tone of his letters home describing Gokul Ashtami has been replaced by a certain amount of involvement and wonder. Yet even at that time he was aware that the celebrations embodied a significant experience: 'When the festival was over one was left with something inexplicable, which grows a little clearer with the passage of years.' In the novel Forster attempts with imaginative sympathy to give expression and form to the inexplicable.

In the Hindu section there seems to be as much if not more chaos and confusion than in the other two. The climax of the ceremony enacting the birth of Krishna, whose image is 'indistinguishable in the jumble of his own altar', is the playful scrummaging in the 'divine mess' of greasy rice and milk. Summing up the Westerner's impressions Forster observes: 'Looking back at the great blur of the last twenty-four hours, no man could say where was the emotional centre of it, any more than he could locate the heart of a cloud.'

Of the celebrants Forster writes : 'they did not one thing which the non-Hindu would feel dramatically correct ; this approaching triumph of India was a muddle (as we call it), a frustration of reason and form.' The key phrase here is 'as we call it' (*Italics mine*). For the Hindu on the other hand this chaos is governed by an underlying harmony—the love of God—in the same way that there is a harmony—the logic of emotions—underlying the chaos of the Indian character. Forster indicates this harmony in subtle ways :

'Music there was, but from so many sources that the sum total was untrammelled. The braying banging crooning melted into a single mass which trailed round the palace before joining the thunder. Rain fell at intervals through the night.'

With the caves it will be remembered the great number and variety of caves caused confusion and bewilderment. Here we have the reverse—it is *because* there are so many sources of music that there is no confusion, no tangles—'the sum total was untrammelled.' The love of God ('God is love') or 'the universal warmth' (symbolised by the pervasive rain) melts what to the Western ear is cacophony into 'completeness' ('a single mass') which joins up with the thunder. 'Completeness not reconstruction', because the latter implies 'logic and conscious effort.'

The harmony and completeness of Hinduism is potentially all-inclusive. It even assimilates practical jokes such as the nobles', 'innocent frolic' with butter. Forster observes : 'By sacrificing good taste this worship achieved what Christianity has shirked : the inclusion of merriment . if practical jokes are banned, the circle is incomplete'.

The love that transfigures the celebrants is collective and impersonal. Like divine love it does not distinguish between individuals—'all men loved each other and avoided by instinct whatever could cause inconvenience or pain.' This provides a contrast to the supreme importance humanism places on personal relations and individualism and Christianity on a personal God.

The love issues in excitement and joy :

'...Infinite love took upon itself the form of SHRI KRISHNA, and saved the world. All sorrow was annihilated, not only for Indians, but for foreigners, birds, caves, railways and stars ; all became joy, all laughter ; there had never been disease nor doubt, misunderstanding, cruelty, fear. Some jumped in the air, others flung themselves prone and embraced the bare feet of the universal lover ; the women behind the purdah slapped and shrieked ; the little girl slipped out and danced by herself, her black pigtailed flying.'

The rhythm of the prose with its repetition of 'all' the piling-up of

nouns, the springing succession of short clauses, and the vivid detail of the girl being unleashed, all contribute to enact the release of delirious joy. The joy 'seethes to jollity' (that is joy without grace of form) as the nobles begin their pranks with the butter. It spreads through the whole town. From the Guest House 'the town was a blur of light, in which the houses seemed dancing, and the palace waving little wings.' Even nature participates in it—'earth and sky leant towards one another, about to clash in ecstasy.' Unlike the weary and melancholy confusion of the Marabar hills, the disorder here is permeated by vitality and joyous abandon.

The season also has changed. The fiery haze of the hot season has been replaced by the cool rainy blur of the monsoons. The tanks and rivers fill with rain-water giving renewed vitality to man (both physical and spiritual) and nature. Forster refers to 'the strange temporary life of the August flood-water'. The sun which so cruelly deprived the world of colour and vitality has changed its face—'the friendly sun of the monsoons shone forth and flooded the world with colour, so that the yellow tigers painted on the palace walls seemed to spring.'

In the mild and rainy atmosphere of Mau, saturated with love and joy, everything melts—all hostility, all divisions, everything rational and clear-cut such as the Muslims' symmetrical injunction—'There is no God but God', and all problems are, if not solved, at least resolved. The mood of the season and the festival even reconciles people to death without depriving them of the urge to live: 'There was death in the air, but not sadness; a compromise had been made between destiny and desire, and even the heart of man acquiesced.' We are made to feel this compromise in a beautiful piece of evocation of the evening scene in which images of death—royal tombs with their ghostly radiance, the hornbills looking like 'winged skeleton'—are counterpointed with 'signs of the contented Indian evening'—the frogs, the fruit bats making kissing noises on the surface of the tank. The humanist's attitude to death is opposed to this compromise: Fielding and Adela believe that one can only live if one turns away from, ignores death.

The atmosphere of reconciliation also dissolves the differences between the outsiders, Aziz and the English. Even in the scene at the shrine when Aziz almost quarrels with Fielding, their excited exchanges are drowned by the sound of the rain 'which exploded like pistols' (love is powerful). Later Aziz, once again reanimated by his love for Mrs. Moore, becomes responsive to the mood of the Hindu festival. 'Now is the time when all things are happy, young and old', he tells Ralph. He even admits that 'this is India'. Under the influence of the festival Aziz's renewed love

spreads to Mrs. Moore's son, in fact to all the English. '...Soon torrents of hospitality gushed forth and he began doing the honours of Man.' He even remembers to take a second pair of oars for Fielding's boat. With Mrs. Moore's son who, Aziz begins to feel, is 'not so much a visitor as a guide' ( he uncannily finds the one spot from where the Rajah's father's image can be seen ), with Ralph urging him on to go closer and closer, the monsoon wind blows them straight in the direction of the place where the clay model of Gokul is to be submerged. Just at the climax of the ceremony and the storm Aziz's and Fielding's boats collide with one another and with the village of Gokul ( no doubt one of God's practical jokes ! ). The collision is a merging, a reconciliation. If the waves of the tank can fuse the evil and the good ( 'King Kansa was confounded with the father and mother of the Lord' ), they can unite, even if it is only temporarily, Muslim and English, including Adela and Ronny, Aziz's great enemies, whose letters appropriated by Aziz from the Guest House slip out of his pocket and 'float confusedly'.

It will be clear from the foregoing analysis that what the Mau section does is to turn the negatives of the caves the right way up by giving them a positive value. Thus whereas the terrifying nothingness of the caves signifies non-existence, in Hinduism nothingness signifies absence, absence of love, joy, generosity etc. The caves annihilate distinctions between ethical values, and hence values themselves. Hinduism transcends ethical values by merging them into a higher order of absolute values. The monotonous, depressing confusion of the caves becomes the joyous hugger-mugger of Gokul Ashtami. With the caves number and variety are directly proportional to chaos, in the Hindu ceremony the greater the number and variety, of, say, musical noises (or just noises), the more all-inclusive the harmony, the greater the transcendence. Finally the chaos of the caves disintegrates humanity, its force is centrifugal ; that of the Hindu celebrations strengthens humanity's feeling of solidarity, its force is centripetal.

Finally, we are left with the structural connection of this part to the rest of the book. The connection through plot—Aziz and Fielding are reconciled before their final parting—is slight since it runs so thinly through this section and adds nothing new about the Indo-English encounter. The main connection is Godbole, both directly since he participates in a few episodes in the first two Parts and hovers mysteriously over many others like Mrs. Wilcox in *Howards End*, and indirectly through Mrs. Moore.

First, his relationship to Mrs. Moore. After the cave incident Mrs. Moore comes to resemble Godbole in a number of ways, but with a



crucial difference. For instance she loses her faith in the supreme importance of personal relations. Godbole, it will be recalled, symbolically sat at a distance from the gathering at Fielding's party. Not that he doesn't care for people, but as he tells Aziz he can only be the latter's 'true friend' as far as his limitations and his holy festival permit. Secondly like Godbole she realises the insufficiency of the conscious mind and language to cope with life: 'Say, say, say. As if anything can be said.' Thirdly, she joins the select band in Forster's fiction (to which Godbole also belongs) of what Peter Burra calls 'elemental characters', who are 'utterly recipient of the reality behind appearances, both in matters of general truth and of incidents in the story'.<sup>7</sup> Mrs. Moore comes closest to Godbole when Aziz, while rowing the boat on the tank, hears in the interstices of the chant, 'Radhakrishna, Radhakrishna, Krishnaradha', etc., 'the syllables of salvation (Esmis Esmoor) that had sounded during his trial at Chandrapore'. Mrs. Moore has been assimilated into Hinduism. But there is the crucial difference, which is that Mrs Moore's indifference and apathy are rooted in despair. And her despair is due to the inability of a mind which has been brought up to cherish personal relations, love, marriage, ethical values and a personal God, to *accept* their insignificance, and by accepting that to transcend them as Godbole does. She represents the utter disintegration of Western values, which forms an essential step towards Hinduism.

Although Godbole never goes to the caves, we come to feel that he is a kind of guardian spirit of the caves. When Aziz and Godbole discuss them, the latter seems to be 'concealing something'. Significantly it is Godbole who describes the caves in terms of negatives. At the caves, unable to explain the place, Aziz feels lost without Godbole. And a little later, Forster remarks, 'Professor Godbole had never mentioned an echo, it never impressed him perhaps'. We come to feel that the key to the caves is in Godbole's possession

My interpretation of the novel has tried to show how the caves overarch humanism and Christianity, and Hinduism the caves. It would be wrong to think that the Marabar Hills are the last word in the novel, or as Crews puts it, that 'Hinduism too, like Islam and Christianity, seems powerless before the nihilistic message of the Marabar Caves'.<sup>8</sup> In this connection we should recall that India's last message to the dying Mrs. Moore at Bombay is that the Marabar Caves are not final. In Godbole's religion, after all, Lord Krishna saves not only Indians, but also 'foreigners, birds, caves, railways and stars'.

# SHAKESPEARE CRITICISM IN BENGAL

---

K. LAHIRI

## I. *Shakespeare Study in Bengal :*

It is as much a truism to say that Shakespeare is not of a land but of all lands as it is to hold that he is not of an age but for all time. Britain's Indian empire was well lost, but her Shakespeare, whom Carlyle so nobly desired not to go, was not lost to India either. The sun of Shakespeare's genius, rising on the English shore, touched the coconut and palm groves on the distant strands of Bengal and came to abide there as permanently as in the land of his ascension. There he has not been kept confined to the colonial prison cells of text books, class rooms and examination halls, but admitted liberally to the wide commonalty of thought and culture, and received warmly to breathe the free air of the intellectual life of the nation. It has been not simply the tedious duty of teachers and students to study and prepare themes on Shakespeare for class lectures or answers to questions in examinations but the pleasant privilege of disinterested people to browse in his rich fields and collect treasures in his realms of gold. And it has not all been a silent appreciation and enjoyment ; many have been vocal too in expressing their thrill and communicating their exaltation of spirit. And there may be felt unmistakable symptoms of genuine pleasure when they talk and write on Shakespeare.

## II. *Bengal's Contribution to Shakespeare Criticism :*

Considering the long period of time during which Shakespeare has been studied in our colleges and universities, Bengal's contribution to Shakespeare criticism and research has not been quite negligible. And it has come both from men in the academic sphere, directly associated with higher education, and from people in the larger literary world outside. The list of writers on Shakespeare, dating from the nineteenth century, has been pretty long, and their number is increasing steadily in recent times.

Professors, scholars, authors have freely written on Shakespeare, and some of these writings have received recognition abroad. The earlier critical essays on Shakespeare appeared in Indian languages in purely local periodicals, monthlies and quarterlies, while later, Shakespeare

criticism was written primarily in English, and learned papers were contributed to journals with international circulation. The spread of Shakespeare studies in this country may be easily guessed from the above fact. Apart from such serious productions, a sizable mass of casual writings on Shakespeare is also buried in college magazines and annuals. These contributions came as much from students as from teachers who found special interest in Shakespeare.

Independent volumes on Shakespeare have been generally the work of scholars in the teaching profession, and up till now in the medium of English. Critical volumes on Shakespeare in Indian languages are still waiting for their pioneer authors.

### *III. Renaissance Bengal's Interest in Shakespeare :*

Shakespeare touched the fancy and feeling of Bengal's literate section of society in the wake of her cultural Renaissance in the nineteenth century. Teachers and students, scholars and writers have been interested in Shakespeare early and late. Since English education was introduced in this part of the country in the second quarter of the last century there has been a steady stream of Shakespeare criticism, mostly appreciative, both in English and in local languages. Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Dwijendra Lal Roy, Ramendra Sundar Trivedi, Rabindra Nath Tagore, in fact there is not a great name in modern Bengal who has not written something sometime on Shakespeare.

Even those of our alumni, who belonged not to the world of literature, but to other realms like Philosophy, Politics, Science, like Brojendra Nath Seal, Prafulla Chandra Ray, Aurobindo Ghosh, took up their pen to join the chorus of eulogy to Shakespeare's dignified name.

### *IV. Captain D. L. Richardson :*

At the early stage of Bengal's Cultural Renaissance in the nineteenth century a handful of English and Anglo-Indian teachers in institutions like the Hindu College and the Oriental Seminary inspired the rising generation of the sons of the soil to study English literature. They naturally interested their pupils in the rich treasure of Shakespeare's dramatic art. Captain D. L. Richardson was a doyen among them. Inspired by them, educated Bengalees not simply enjoyed Shakespeare, but expressed their appreciation in enthusiastic language. That was the beginning of Shakespeare criticism in Bengal.

Shakespeare's creative powers, displayed in his dramatic and poetic art, did not escape Richardson's critical insight. He observed the perfect

naturalness in Shakespeare's representation of men and women, and he realised too that it was from this naturalness that the master's creations received their universal validity, the power to appeal with as much force to readers in India as to those in his own country.

This truth, which earlier English or Anglo-Indian teachers in Calcutta, like Drummond and Derozio, could not utter distinctly, though coming very near recognizing it in their faith that Indians could faithfully recite the roles of Shakespearean characters, was declared by Richardson, overcoming the barriers of race and colour :

"Shakespeare especially had addressed himself to the universal heart. The jealousy of Othello, the ambition of Macbeth are perfectly appreciated by the intelligent Hindoo alumni of an English college in Calcutta, as by the students of a scholastic establishment in the poet's native land."

Richardson's critical instinct was not, however, always reliable. For instance, though he had the most enthusiastic admiration for the rich variety of Shakespeare's men, he could not recognize the master's equal freedom in his creations of the fair sex : an illustration of failure on the part of the critic to overcome the rather restricted view of women in the nineteenth century society.

So we find Richardson unreserved in his praise of Shakespeare's creation of men :

"Of endless variety of male characters it is unnecessary to speak, for even the dullest reader owns the truth and force of his portraits of men. Who that has once become acquainted with Lear and Hamlet and Macbeth and Iago and Othello could ever forget them ? When we are presented with such full length portraits of humanity as these, so distinct and animated, we receive an impression that can never fade but with life itself."

Against such unstinted admiration of the abundance and richness of Shakespeare's male characters, there is discernible in Richardson a strained endeavour to cover his critical myopoeia with a glorification of Shakespeare's faithfulness to life on the count of a less varied gallery of women. Thus Richardson seeks to turn the deprecatory idea, 'that the female characters in Shakespeare's plays are less prominently marked and less variously distinguished than those of the sterner sex', into a compliment. This is, he contends, quite natural to the gentler sex : 'the perfect truth and nature of the poet's delineations..... If Shakespeare had brought out the lines of his female characters as strongly as those of the other sex, he would have been guilty of an error into which he of all men was the least likely to be led..... He well knew that..... the fairer and gentler half of our kind are less individually distinguished by prominent and peculiar traits than men. Partly from their primal nature and partly from the

uniformity of their conventional condition, they are generally as like one another in their moral and intellectual character as in the delicacy of their external conformation'.

Richardson's zeal in Shakespeare studies had a most salubrious influence on the eager student community of the day. Animated by his inspired Shakespeare teaching, his Indian pupils were encouraged to reciting and acting Shakespeare's dramas, and some of them were even stimulated to original composition in their mother tongue. It is undeniable that he was responsible not a little for the flowering of Michael Madhusudan Datta's poetic genius.

From providing recreation for an hour by making Indian students recite parts from Shakespeare's plays, he led them on to an abiding interest and adventure of the intellect by encouraging the appreciation of Shakespeare's drama on the literary front.

#### *V. Early Indian Criticism : General Praise :*

The early indigenous critical approach to Shakespeare was pure appreciation of his genius. In their first enthusiasm the Indians simply indulged in an effusion of praise of the master's literary beauties in a general, abstract way with rarely any assessment of a particular work or a special quality. Hardly anybody touched or dwelt on the dramatic or stage aspects of the plays.

In 1843 one Banquo Behari Dutt appreciated Shakespeare's uncultivated genius, in spite of his deficiency as a scholar, imperfections as an artist, and carelessness as a writer—defects which had been pointed out long before by critics in Shakespeare's own country, from Ben Jonson to Dr. Johnson. "Yet Ben Jonson", observed this early obscure Bengalee critic, "is only coldly approved, while Shakespeare is praised to a degree almost bordering on idolatry".

In 1877 or 1878 John Bright, in introducing Lalmohan Ghosh before an English audience, remarked that there were as many students of Shakespeare and Milton on the banks of the Ganges as on the banks of the Thames.

#### *VI. Michael Madhusudan Dutt :*

Michael Madhusudan Dutt, who has to his credit a substantial contribution of original literary work in English, has also the honour of being one of the pioneers in Bengal of Shakespeare criticism written in English. He is the worthy successor in this of the great English teacher, Captain D. L. Richardson.

In his Shakespeare criticism, appreciative all through, Madhusudan

Dutt is equally alive to the literary powers of the master as to the stage aspects of his work. In his critical writings on Shakespeare, which appeared as stray essays in 1860, Shakespeare's realistic presentation of life is admired highly, and his power of comprehending universal human passions in their intensity recognised. Shakespeare's plays, he observes, "have the stern realities of life, lofty passion, and heroism of sentiment." In this he ranks Shakespeare with the great European dramatists, and casually notices the contrast between Shakespeare's realistic drama and the romantic drama of the East, by which he obviously meant the classical Sanskrit drama of India. Though Madhusudan missed the romantic character of Shakespeare's drama, as distinct from the strictly classical type of Greek and Latin dramas, his implied casual contrast between Shakespeare's drama and Sanskrit drama, was taken up in earnest and fully developed into comparative studies of dramatic situation and atmosphere, plot and character, in the plays of Shakespeare and Kalidas by later Bengalee critics for over half a century, from Iswar-chandra Vidyasagar and Dwijendra Lal Roy to Aurobindo Ghosh and Rabindranath Tagore.

Madhusudan Dutt also drew attention to the performance side of Shakespeare's drama. Shakespeare's plays, according to him, are highly stageable, though at first these "were not better acted than Indian dramas."

#### *VII. Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar :*

Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, one of the leaders in the cultural renaissance of nineteenth century Bengal, was not only responsible for humanitarian social reforms and the emergence of a prose style for original writing in Bengali, but also a path-finder of Bengali literary criticism with a modern, liberal outlook. A Sanskrit scholar of orthodox traditional order as he was, it was singularly bold on his part to have studied critically Shakespeare's plays, and this clearly shows his cosmopolitan interest and catholicism in literary taste.

In his casual criticism of Shakespeare, Vidyasagar, while following the trend of the then English-educated Bengalee society in appreciating Shakespeare's genius in general, abstract terms, at the same time shows his distinctive individual approach in making comparative assessments of the master's particular plays.

In the preface to his Bengali comic sketch, *Bhranti-Vilas*, an adaptation of *The Comedy of Errors*, Vidyasagar no doubt admires, in the common idolatrous tone obtaining so far here as much as there, the energy of Shakespeare's poetic powers and the excellence of his literary style in the dramas, but he is not blind to the relative merits of individual plays, nor

is he incapable of a discriminating valuation of them through critical analyses of their varied literary qualities. He had the clarity of vision to see the literary inferiority of *The Comedy of Errors* to Shakespeare's other plays which are justly celebrated for their greatness. But nonetheless this Sanskrit Pandit had in him the vivacity of spirit under an austere moralistic exterior, to appreciate the amusing quality of the story and Shakespeare's rare skill in creating humour. Therein the critic recognises the function of the comic artist, while minding serious artistry, to provide also enjoyable fun for the audience.

#### VIII. *Comparative Study of Drama, Shakespearean and Indian :*

Michael Madhusudan Dutt only observed casually the contrast between Shakespeare's realistic drama and oriental romantic drama. Others advanced further and established regular and elaborate comparisons. The affinity between a Shakespearean character and a character out of a Sanskrit drama was observed and their differences closely marked. The artistic method followed in a Shakespeare play and that observed in an Indian drama were minutely analysed and contrasted, Shakespeare's imaginative powers were assessed and appreciated against those of classical writers of the East.

How far such comparative studies of Shakespeare and Indian authors were prompted by the spirit of enquiry into the elements of great literature and to what extent did such appreciative comparisons proceed from the spirit of acceptance of the superiority of the literature of the rulers, are matters which still await close analysis and measurement. Or, it might be that "this method of criticism was not always dictated by literary reasons, but was a kind of self-assertion against the pressure of the newly introduced English literature which wanted Indian literatures to examine themselves in terms set by itself". This sense of national self-complacency and prestige rather than a spontaneous, unconditioned aesthetic appreciation was at work behind such critical ventures. The Indian intellectuals, sense of pride as much in the glory of her Sanskrit classics as in that of India's ancient archeology was beginning to assert itself in the mild form of cultural Renaissance as a prelude to the strong upsurge of the spirit of nationalism which was to see its full growth and gain an irresistible force in the birth of political consciousness later in the century. A revival of interest in national art and literature followed closed in the heels of the sense of wounded Hindu vanity that came in the wake of an admission of the superiority Western literature and science. Naturally the new generation receiving the intellectual training of English education turned to exercise their mind on a fresh evaluation of classical Sanskrit poetry and drama

in order to recognise their high aesthetic merit in comparison to their counterparts in the works of Shakespeare and European classical masters.

*Comparison of Shakespeare with Sanskrit drama :*

Enjoying the literary beauties of Shakespeare's plays and contemplating on his creative powers, the enlightened sections of Indians were naturally reminded of the glorious achievements of their own classical dramatists in Sanskrit, like Kalidas and Bhababhuti. Comparative studies of the great literatures of the East and of the West were inviting to convince the rulers and themselves of the superiority of our national cultural heritage. Hence many writers naturally indulged in comparative speculations on the nature and qualities of Shakespearean drama and those of Sanskrit drama, particularly that of Kalidas.

Such comparative studies are normally expected to emphasize and bring out the basic differences in tone and principles between oriental aesthetics and rhetoric guiding classical Sanskrit drama and the theories of poetics followed in the traditions of occidental dramatic literature coming down from Greece and Rome and ending in Shakespeare's bold innovations. The writers dwell briefly or at length on these aspects philosophically and critically. But the affinity in the minds of the artists and the similarities in the creative processes of imagination, though separated widely by time and space, do not escape the notice of this new generation of Indian critics of Shakespeare. They are sensitive enough to observe and be impressed by surprisingly close semblances, though occurring by pure chance, in dramatic situations, in details of dramaturgical devices, even in the conceptions of principal characters. Thus their Shakespeare criticism often takes the form of drawing out analogies and parallelisms between scenes, atmospheres and characterizations in Shakespeare's plays and classical Sanskrit dramas. The cultural background of life and literature for the English writer and that for his Indian counterpart were poles apart, and so were the dramatic principles followed by them and the poetic imagery they used. But strangely enough their vision of life, their comprehension of human relations, and the nature of appeal to the audience, reveal unexpected similarities.

*X. Shakespeare and Kalidas compared :*

Of all the writers of dramatic literature in the East Kalidas comes first and last to the critic's mind for favourable comparison with the greatest master of drama in the western world. 'A comparative study of Shakespeare and Kalidas was long a favourite literary pastime for many of our



great writers'. They exercised their critical ingenuity in establishing all sorts of semblances, obvious or far-fetched, between their dramatic productions.

Their approaches in tracing similitude are sometimes from an identical angle of vision and sometimes different and varied.

(A) *Haraprasad Sastri* :

In 1878 Haraprasad Sastri, the then principal of the Sanskrit College, Calcutta, and a scholar versed in oriental knowledge of Sanskrit, Pali and Tibetan and also well acquainted with western literatures in English, French and German, brought out a work on the interpretation of Kalidas and a few supplementary articles in Bengali periodicals. Therein he indulged in a lengthy critical comparison of Kalidas and Shakespeare as writers of drama.

His national pride did not stand on the way of his frank and enthusiastic recognition of Shakespeare's higher power and superior artistic perfection in natural representation of the heights and depths of human nature all round. He claimed, on the one hand, that Kalidas's excellence and delicacy in presenting the soft and sweet aspects of human nature, the tender graces of a maidenly character, for instance, can not be surpassed by Western writers. On the other hand, he contended with equal conviction that Shakespeare displayed no less skill in presenting soft, sweet aspects of human relations, like love and affection, and in delineating bitter, violent aspects of human nature, like cruelty and villainy, such as Kalidas never attempted to depict, either out of temperamental deficiency, or rather for being handicapped by Sanskrit classical convention to keep violence out of art. Kalidas is supreme in his conception of Sakuntala representing the ideal of Indian womanhood in her dual aspects of maidenly delicacy and conjugal loyalty and dignity. She embodies innocence and emotion. The Sanskrit dramatist does not attribute to his heroine any intellectual maturity or power. Shakespeare shows equal skill and vigour of imagination in conceiving violence and softness in his men and women. He represents masculine strength and passion in Othello and Leontes, and youthful romance and love in Romeo and Ferdinand. On the other side, while Miranda and Desdemona stand respectively for feminine innocence, grace and faithfulness, firmness, Lady Macbeth and Cleopatra show subtlety, wiles, intellectual power that we cannot find in any representation of the fair sex in oriental works of art and literature.

(B). *Dwijendra Lal Roy* :

The renowned Bengali poet and dramatist, Dwijendra Lal Roy, popularly known as D. L. Roy, is scarcely regarded as a literary critic. But in his

slight, yet precious, critical writing he has paid unstinted tribute to Shakespeare's genius.

An ardent nationalist, the father of the Indian National Anthem, *Bande Mataram*, D. L. Roy holds high the universal appeal of Shakespeare's work and his international recognition. He observes too the kinship, in imaginative and artistic life, between this great master of Western drama and the distinguished pioneer of aesthetic creation in the East. Shakespeare, England's greatest dramatist-poet, is compared by D. L. Roy to his noble Indian predecessor, Kalidas, in language soaked in the spirit of reverence and admiration. The two master creators, separated by a wide distance of time and space, are ranked side by side. Their fraternity is recognised by the enlightened Indian mind: "The gentle Indian on the bank of the Ganges considers Shakespeare as the loving brother of Kalidas, embraces him as the world poet, and pays homage to him reverentially."

A few years later, at the Tercentenary of Shakespeare's death, in 1916, another great poet of Bengal, Rabindra Nath Tagore, who himself was cosmopolitan in spirit and was honoured with the noblest appellation of *Viswa-Kabi* or World-Poet, echoed D. L. Roy's feeling, even language in claiming that though the sun of Shakespeare's genius rose on the English horizon, the light of his creation illumined gloriously the groves of palms on the distant shores of Bengal :

"When by the far-away sea your fiery disk appeared from behind the unseen, O poet, O sun, England's horizon felt you near her breast, and took you to be her own.

She kissed your forehead, caught you in the arms of her forest branches, hid you behind her mist mantle and watched you in the green sward where fairies love to play among meadow flowers.

A few early birds sang your hymn of praise while the rest of the woodland choir were asleep. Then at the silent beckoning of the Eternal you rose higher and higher till you reached the mid-sky, making all quarters of heaven your own.

Therefore at this moment, after the end of centuries, the palm groves by the Indian Sea raise their tremulous branches to the sky murmuring your praise."

(C) *Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay* :

Casual observations of chance resemblances and significant parallelisms of situations and characters between Shakespearean and Sanskrit dramas by early Bengalee readers naturally tempted later critics who picked up the cues earnestly and developed them steadily into a systematic and elaborate study in comparative literature. The most remarkable contribution in

this direction was made by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, the father of prose fiction in Bengali, in one of his many rich and thought-provoking critical essays which deserve more attention than they have received so far. Bankimchandra is looked upon as the pioneer novelist in Indian literature. But his stature as a critic is no less great. And his essays in literary criticism reveal as much power and penetration as those on sociological issues. And of all his writings on literature the comparative study of the dramas of Shakespeare and Kalidas shows his rare critical insight.

In 1887 Bankimchandra delightfully shocked the educated lovers of western literature among his countrymen with a refreshing paper, *Sakuntala, Miranda and Desdemona*. Therein he pointed out the surprising similarity of the character created by Kalidas with those of Shakespeare, though the Indian and the English poets could not have met, removed from each other by thousands of miles and many centuries; nor is there any evidence to show that the later writer did know of the earlier author's work and was influenced by it. No common source of their respective works has been traced or could be guessed either.

*Sakuntala*, Bankimchandra's discerning eye beautifully strikes upon the analogy, is half *Miranda* and half *Desdemona*: the heroine of the Indian dramatist absorbs in her early life all the features from the child of Shakespeare's ripe fancy, while she evinces in her later stage the characteristics of the earlier creation of the English poet. Young *Sakuntala*, the immature girl in the sweet company of her friends in the early part of Kalidas's *Abhijnan Sakuntalam*, resembles closely Shakespeare's mature product, *Miranda* in childlike innocence and naive simplicity of nature, while elderly *Sakuntala*, the coolbrained woman in the latter part of the Sanskrit drama, in the embittered relation to her husband, approaches Shakespeare's earlier creation, *Desdemona*, in patient fidelity and rocklike firmness of character.

Neither of the two girls is spoiled by the sophisticating influence of society, the heated atmosphere of high life in the court, *Miranda* more so, being away from the world of men beyond the seas, while *Sakuntala*, though brought up in the hermitage with the flower plants and young deer in the forest, was not very far from the human world. *Sakuntala's* love, unexpressed in words, comes out in the tender gracefulness of her manners and bearing, in describing which the oriental poets' fancy and skill are in full play; *Miranda*, not cultivated at all in the art of maidenly delicacy, reared up as she has been in the seclusion of the isle of her father's magic creation, is frankly explicit in her words, effusive in confessing, without the least reserve, her attraction to and admiration for the young Ferdinand thrown in her way,

Like Desdemona, steely in her adamancy as in her effulgence, Sakuntala too, even when wronged by her lover, remains unwavering in her loving devotion and fidelity to her lord. Oriental aesthetics forbade tragedy, and so Kalidas had to conventionally bring the couple together again. But the sad and then happy, ending of the Sanskrit drama in the heroine's ultimate reunion with and refusal by her husband, and in her second temporary separation, followed by final acceptance, has no western counterpart or parallel Shakespearean drama, though Shakespeare's tolerant fancy in the serene reconciliation of advanced years ventured to reunite estranged lovers in Leontes and Hermione, with effects rather melodramatic than sublime. Between *A Winter's Tale* and *Abhijnan Sakuntalam* there are other points of similarity, which have escaped the notice of Indian critics. In both the plays, the child, born unknown to or disowned by the father, is utilized by the dramatists as a link to re-establish the connection of the parents. In each, a token—Perdita's scarf and Sakuntala's ring—helps recognition. The heroine is temporarily separated before the final reunion with her lord: Hermione is given shelter to live incognito at Paulina's place till her resurrection, and Sakuntala has to sojourn to her heavenly abode of *apsaras*. Divine intervention—the Delphic oracle in one and the voice from heaven in the other—is necessary in each case to convince the unbelieving deserters in repentance.

(D) *Rabindra Nath Tagore :*

In Shakespeare criticism in Bengal the comparative method of study initiated in the nineteenth century continued and developed steadily in the twentieth. At first it was just a casual, though highly suggestive, observation of similarity between Shakespeare's works and some Indian classics. Then came a more specific comparison between aspects of Shakespearean drama and aspects of Kalidas's drama. This led to the analytical study of particular characters on both sides: Kalidas's Sakuntala on the one hand and Shakespeare's Desdemona, Miranda, Perdita on the other.

In recent times the same comparison, touched by Rabindra Nath Tagore's 'rare critical insight', yielded richer results. With Haraprasad Sastri and Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay the character studies were still superficial, bearing on the outer life in the practical world. Rabindra Nath's artistic sympathy and keener sensibility dived deeper into the soul of literary creations and revealed intimately the poet's relation to human life and Nature.

Rabindra Nath's comparison between Shakespeare and Kalidas is much

fuller and more critically penetrating. In 1902 he published a paper, *Sakuntala*, in Bengali, in which he elaborated in his masterly fashion the points of similarity and contrast between the characters of Sakuntala and Miranda. He observed their resemblance in being represented fundamentally as children of Nature : both being reared in isolation from society and growing in the simplicity of natural environments. But Tagore, with his discerning critical eye, revealed also the fundamental difference in the attitudes of the two poets, the one of the East and the other of the West, in their ways of running Man and Nature together.

Tagore considered *The Tempest* as inferior to *Abhijnan Sakuntalam* in respect of bringing Man and Nature nearer. In Shakespeare's play external Nature is symbolized in her two opposite aspects in the figures of Ariel and Caliban. Both represent Nature's pristine forms of energy : the one standing for her brute force, the other for her finer essence of power. Though both are in human shape, Caliban is a beast of a man, while Ariel is more a spirit than a human child. Both these embodiments of Nature's power are enslaved to Man, and are drudging for him : one does the crude daily chores, e.g. carrying wood for fire ; the other is the playful instrument of magic, mysteriously bringing things and people together. But neither of the two personifications of Nature has any loving relationship to Man ; both keep 'away from human kinship.' Both grudge and resent the power of Man ruling over them and would, at the earliest opportunity, throw off the human bondage. The one would outrage human association and would pull down the heavenly purity and innocence in Man represented in Miranda to the unrefined, gross animal crudity of Nature ; the other, an unwilling partner in human endeavours, would fain escape into Nature's essential freedom : a potent agency in restoring and generating human love, it remains scrupulously above its infecting influence. In *The Tempest* 'there exists no affection in Nature's heart, nor a tear in her eyes.' Both the representations of Nature, once they are liberated from the enslavement to Man, will revert to and merge in Nature's elemental state and will not in the best pine for their lost human associations. Ariel will not like to retain any humiliating, painful remembrance of his master Prospero, while Caliban is by nature incapable of having any soft sentiment for mistress Miranda.

India's poet, Kalidas, true to the spirit of her characteristic forest civilization, has beautifully realised the essential oneness of Man with Nature, and effected a happy and complete integration of the two. The Flora and Fauna of Indian Nature, while fully maintaining their independent entity apart from man, have at the same time mixed with human life in a sweet relationship, and they gladly play their graceful role along with the

sons and daughters of Man in the cosmic drama of life. As the heroine is about to depart from her nursery of the hermitage, the plants she used to water shed tears at her fond caressing touch, and the little fawning deer clings to her skirts and lovingly shadows her steps for a good distance beyond the pale of her maidenhood abode. It is not the conception of Nature unwillingly drudging to Man; it is a peaceful picture of both Nature and Man linked in love and harmony, and each softly responding to the other's feeling approach. The pain in the parting of their ways is delicately rendered by the Indian Muse. It is not a forced bondage, but a willing partnership, a spontaneous reciprocation in a two-way traffic, a perfect interfusion of spirits in the oriental fashion.

Thus Tagore observes that the representation of Nature in Shakespeare's art varies radically from the conception of Nature in Indian literature because of a fundamental distinction between the western and the oriental outlooks on life and the universe. In European literature there is between Man and Nature an eternal war for gaining supremacy, and the protagonist's character reaches fulness of development through this perpetual struggle. In the oriental art consciousness there subsists a permanent peace between the world of humanity and the realm of natural environments: at every step of his life Man associates himself with and advances to Nature, and Nature on her part responds and reciprocates, resulting in perfect cooperation between the two and their mutual nourishment and fruition. In the essay, *Sakuntala*, in the volume, *Pracin Sahitya* ( Ancient Literature ) Rabindranath beautifully brings out this contrast :

"In *The Tempest* man has not grown up by expanding himself through loving union with the universe, but has aspired after overlordship by suppressing and subjugating the rest of the universe. Indeed, the spirit of conflict, the struggle for power, is the central idea of *The Tempest*. There Prospero, dispossessed of his own kingdom, is extending, by his magic power, his severe sway over the realm of Nature. Even among the few beings, who have survived somehow from the clutches of impending death in the storm on the sea, there are brewing conspiracy, treachery, and secret attempts at murder—all for sovereignty over this desert island. At the close of the drama all the conflicts come to a cessation, but nobody can assure that they end for good, that it is not a truce but peace."

In sharp contrast to this representation of hostility between humanity and the power of his environments in Shakespeare's drama, there exists in Sanskrit literature no sense of conflict between Man and Nature. In Valmiki's *Ramayan*, Kalidas's *Abhijnan-Sakuntalam*, Bhavabhuti's *Uttar Ramcharitam*, everywhere there may be discerned a hearty relationship, a close co-operation between the life of humanity and the spirit of Nature.

This link of Man with Nature is not a mere external adjustment, a rhetorical decoration, but an inherent aspect of the Indian realization of life in its totality. The endeavour is manifest, with equal intensity and significance in life and in art, for developing self to fulness through maintaining soul-relationship with the whole cosmic universe and identification with the undivided life-consciousness spread in the widest commonalty of Nature. Rabindranath thus conceives the final denouement of dramatic conflict, in art as in life, in the peace and perfection of a unified existence of Man and Nature, effected by the powers of Love and Beauty :

“Corresponding to the war with external Nature, a war is waged within Man. His uncontrollable passions raise internal storms and create conflicts. These passions, like ferocious beasts, have to be kept restrained by control and suppression. But that is only temporary confrontation of force with force. This may serve as a working method for the time being. Our spiritual nature is not prepared to accept this as the ultimate end. By Beauty, by Love, and by Good, evil has to be won over, anaesthetized, and totally sublimated from within—that is the aspiration and goal of our spiritual nature.”—*Ibid*

So, not to assert one's separate entity through conflict, but to realize one's fulness through union—this is the significance and soul of Indian literature. A western poet like Shakespeare has presented in dramatic form the eventful career of the hero, gripped in a life-and-death struggle with Nature, while an oriental poet like Kalidas has achieved the greater glory of truth—realization at the termination of all conflict. Hence the expressions of the dramatic genius of the two countries can not be of an identical character. In Shakespeare's drama the imitation of reality has to be accurate and faithful to actual life. But in Indian literature there should be truth, not of facts, but of idea, the story of life beyond death:

Rabindranath shows that while Shakespeare's development of plot follows the naturalistic course of cause and effect, Kalidas projects his plot beyond the causal chain to meet the demand of the soul, even though this may need a divine intervention in human affairs. Tagore's remarks on the denouement of the plot and the final reunion in *Abhijnan-Sakuntalam* have been made in the perspective of Eastern and Western conventions :

“It is my firm belief that at the stage where Dusyanta, recovering his ring from the fisherman's hand, realizes his mistake, a European poet would have drawn down the curtain on the fruitless repentance of the hero. The accidental union in the last act between Dusyanta and Sakuntala on her way back from heaven is not necessary as an inevitable event according to the laws of European drama. For the seed sown in

the beginning of the play is expected to reach its natural fruition in this separation. Even after the breach the reunion has to be brought about through divine mercy. Neither in the sequence of events so far was there dropped any hint paving the way to this reunion, nor was there any indication in their mutual conduct and attitude to justify such a happening."

—*Pracin Sahitya, Kumarsambhavam and Abhijnan-Sakuntalam*

In this observation referring to European poets Rabindranath has definitely Shakespeare in mind. A final separation must result from an initial weakness—this natural evolution of events, this inexorable law of cause—and—effect, is characteristic of the disciplined order of Shakespearean drama. Upto this point Rabindranath admits the similarity of Kalidas's dramatic order with Shakespeare's; but the subsequent development of the plot in Kalidas does not bear the slightest semblance to the Shakespearean order. And Tagore regards this finale of Kalidas's drama not as an unreal figment of fancy, but as a real, integral part of the Indian poet's vision.

The element of chance or accident is not altogether kept out of the dramatic world of Shakespeare; he makes use of it wherever necessary, and even requisitions divine agency to bring about a desired turning in a plot that threatens to go out of his control. As late as Shakespeare's day accidents would hapen, and violent passions could arise in normal life, and the entire range of human nature with all its hidden nooks and corners would be revealed by the lighting flash of a moment. Now in the regimented order of a civilized society happenings by chance are fast waning out.

—*Sahitya* (Literature): Tagore's correspondence with his friend Lokendra Nath Palit, Letter no. 4.

Rabindranath believes that romantic or dramatic plots may be quite suitable to, even needed in certain cases. And a commonplace incident or ordinary character may be highly dramatised by the setting. In the essay on the historical novel, incorporated in the *Sahitya* volume, he cites an illustration of this from *Antony and Cleopatra* and points out that the central issue in this drama is in fact a familiar truth of everyday occurrence. Many a man, unknown and obscure, yet highly talented, has been lost materially and spiritually, being entrapped in the snares of a bewitching woman. The ways of the world are scattered over with the lamentable ruins of such unnoticed nobility and worthiness of men. But an ordinary, commonplace affair may be given an uncommon, extraordinary stature by placing it in a special, over-charged historical setting. The background



of a big political catastrophe intensifies thousand-fold the surge of powerful passion within the human heart. The familiar tale has thus to be elevated to a level of uncommonness in order to be endowed with a tone of remoteness and grandeur. This is not a matter of any special skill in the artist ; it is the rarest gift of the comprehending mind and the feeling heart.

But the chief interest in Shakespeare's dramatic art lies not in subtle plot-construction but in grand characterization. Rabindranath is convinced that Shakespeare's greatness does not consist in an artful conception of a plot. Its superiority is in the nobility and universality of his characters, in depicting in the strongest relief the abiding elements of human nature. Shakespeare's powerful imagination agitates man to the bottom of his being to expose before our over-awed vision the ins and outs of his whole self. The glory of Shakespeare's art is not in a thick conglomeration of events, in an arresting narrative, but in a rich creation of living men and women, such characters as do not depend on a particular age or land, but do adhere to universal humanity. To salvage this image of the eternal man from a wild concourse of men it is not absolutely necessary to resort to an eventful plot. If Shakespeare often took such a course, it was possibly in following a distinct convention or under the urge of some unavoidable necessity. But certainly Shakespeare's greatness does not issue from that quarter.

Tagore ascribes the permanent value of Shakespeare's art to his essential humanism, to his representation of the eternal verities of life, which are not affected by the changing tastes and fashions of society. In discussing the truth of literature he points to the truth of the primary feelings of man represented in Shakespeare's drama :

"In whichever way we may look at his art, our central interest is in man, directly or indirectly. We are not satisfied with fragmentary truths about man ; we demand the whole man, the essential man. We want his smiles, we want his tears, we want his words with the living warmth of his lips, his very gestures of attraction and repulsion are like sunshine and rain to our heart.

"But from where do all these smiles and tears, attraction and repulsion, emanate ? The deep sources of eternal joys and sorrows of humanity in the wide world of Shakespeare's creations, ranging from Falstaff and Dogberry to Lear and Hamlet, touch elementally every reader of his dramas, like the tremendous powers of Nature. We realise greater truth in Shakespeare than in the trivial daily dialogues and fragmented sparkles of smiles and tears in a society novel, although what is described in the latter is a faithful imitation of our everyday existence. But we know that

the society novel of today will become untruth in the perspective of tomorrow's social order, while Shakespeare will never cease to be true." Rabindranath was impressed by Shakespeare's power of revealing the eternal man in his wonderfully varied creations of particular human specimens.

In laying emphasis on Shakespeare's interest in the essential man, Rabindranath Tagore, like Aurobinda Ghosh, sought to interpret Shakespeare as the supreme expression of the Renaissance spirit of liberation of the Life Force from the bondage of mediaeval asceticism. After centuries of suppression they aspired after unbounded pleasure with boundless knowledge. They were eager to grasp life with both hands and out to enjoy all that life could offer. When in Europe the days of restraining the elementary instincts of human nature were over, the dramatic literature of Shakespeare's age was the joyful expression of that Renaissance spirit. The judgement of the good and the evil, the discernment of beauty and ugliness, was not the primary objective of this new literature. Man wanted to liberate his inner nature from all restrictions and allow the fullest expression of its exuberant energy'.

—*Jiban-smriti* ( Memoirs ) *Bhagna-hriday* ( Broken Heart ), 1911.

The Renaissance spirit naturally led to the glorification of both man and woman in Western literature, while they did not receive equal attention and honour in the art and literature of the East. This fundamental difference between the representation of life in the world of Shakespeare's creation and that in Indian literature, generally speaking, has not escaped Rabindranath's critical observation. In the essay, *Nara-Nari* ( Man and Woman ) in the series *Pancha-Bhut* ( The Five Elements ), he starts, with illustrations from Shakespeare, his discussion on the contrast between the supremacy of both the hero and the heroine in English literature and the comparative overshadowing of the male character by the female in Indian literature from classical *Abhijnan-Sakuntalam* to modern *Kapalkundala* :

"In English poetry, as much as in prose fiction, the greatness of both the hero and the heroine is manifest. Othello and Iago are not lacking in lustre beside Desdemona ; Cleopatra has no doubt held in thrall noble Antony by her subtle snares, yet the grandeur of the Roman triumvir is discernible to all like a broken monument entwined by a wild, lush creeper.....But in Bengali literature the prominence of the heroine is to be observed."

But though offering an effusive admiration of Shakespeare's genius, Rabindranath does not, in his own creative work deflect from his essential oriental character and does not imitate Shakespeare's western manner and

outlook. Rabindranath only set his critical mind to work on Shakespeare, but did not allow Shakespeare's artistic methods, however praiseworthy, to affect his creative genius. And his critical intellect was not occupied with criticism of Shakespeare all through his long literary life. Only the last decade of the nineteenth century was the age of Tagore's reflections on Shakespeare. In his plentiful critical writings of other periods in his career we do not come across any appreciation or judgement of Shakespeare's art.

( E ) *Professor Lalit Kumar Banerjee*

The tradition of comparative study of Shakespearean dramas and similar works in Indian literature continued in the twentieth century, though such critical ventures tended to shift from the wider literary world outside to the narrower academic sphere.

In 1910 Professor Lalit Kumar Banerjee, a successful Shakespeare teacher in a Calcutta college and an original writer and critic in Bengali, introduced a refreshing tone into such analogical studies. He extended the scope of comparison on the Indian side from earlier classical drama to modern prose fiction which itself had evolved in the nineteenth century under inspiration from the novel of the West. He observed a parallelism between a Shakespearean creation and a character of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay who had been a Shakespeare critic in Bengali in the preceding generation.

Bankimchandra's *Kapalkundala*, the heroine of his novel titled after her, Professor Banerjee thought, was in some respects derived from Shakespeare's *Miranda*. The conception of the setting on the sea-shore is common to both : the heroine in each case grows up in association with the sea : both *Kapalkundala* and *Miranda* first met their lovers, Nabakumar and Ferdinand respectively on the sea-shore. *Miranda*, before Ferdinand was thrown in her way, had known only two other men for her companions, namely, her loving father, Prospero, and the brutish he-giant, Caliban. Similarly, before Nabakumar, lost on the shore, was accosted by *Kapalkundala*, her corresponding two male companions had been the affectionate *Adhikari Thakur* and the fiendish *Kapalik*, a representative of the obscurantist mediaeval Hindu religious sect practising human sacrifice for the propitiation of his deity.

In Bankimchandra's novel, however, the conception of the guardian angel appears split up in two. Also, the situations, in spite of a feeling of suspense prevailing in each case, are fundamentally different, though both the novels are similar in conceiving the relation subsisting between the guardian and the young man as unhappy.

*XI. Multiplicity of Shakespeare criticism in the twentieth century :*

The twentieth century has ushered in a remarkable multiplicity in Shakespeare criticism in Bengal as in Shakespeare's own country. In England, on the continent and in America critical studies of Shakespeare have been in recent years surprisingly rich and varied, comprehensive and multi-pronged. Approaches are made to the artist's mind, his creations, and environments from all conceivable angles and directions : ranging from textual and linguistic analysis to sociological and symbolic interpretations.

Contemporary Shakespeare criticism in our country, though not as abundant and colourful, yet analogous to the tradition in the poet's native land, bids for greater freedom and diversity. Here it has now reached the stage that was attained in England in the nineteenth century, namely, the state in which literary criticism develops the tendency towards being philosophical and analytic. The study of the latest types of Shakespeare criticism pursued academically by teachers and students of English literature has not yet borne fruit in practical literary fields of criticism in the Indian languages.

Multiplicity and expansion, however, may be seen here in the class and variety of people who now indulge in Shakespeare criticism. It no longer remains confined to teachers of English literature and literary writers in the languages. Shakespeare criticism has ceased to be the special preserve of such limited sections of people. All sorts of writers and thinkers in different walks of cultural life take critical interest in Shakespeare. Hence contributions to Shakespeare criticism have begun to pour in as much from the hands of men of philosophy and religion, science and politics, as from the pens of people in purely educational and literary spheres. Thus it is not rare to get appreciations of Shakespeare's knowledge of life and true wisdom from a scientist like Sri P. C. Ray and a man of religious vision like Sri Aurobinda Ghosh.

*(A) Sir P. C. Ray*

In the present century Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray, better known as Sir P. C. Ray, has been a scientist-critic of Shakespeare in Bengal of no mean stature, and true to the spirit of science he has been a humanistic interpretation of Shakespeare's drama. He was not simply a chemist of international repute and a path-finder for the economic regeneration of his country through initiating the spirit of industrial enterprise, but one who practised and preached untiringly humanism all his life, and taught the adoption of the scientific and rational attitude in all matters and interests of life, including literary appraisal and religious pursuits.

He himself showed the way by appreciating Shakespeare's essential humanism and freedom from political and religious partisanship. Shakespeare, Sir P. C. points out, is universally acclaimed because of his understanding and representing the universal human nature with all its inherent weaknesses and native dignity, untrammelled by any prejudices clinging to a particular age or region. What constitutes, in his opinion, the most remarkable peculiarity of Shakespeare's mind is a 'just and tolerant view of human character and events....We may search all his dramas in vain to know what actually his political as also religious views had been.' The artist in Shakespeare assumes freely the attitudes and views of the most varied characters and creeds, without losing in such faiths his own outlook which was fundamentally human. •

In about a dozen papers published in instalments contributed to *The Calcutta Review* from November, 1939, under the title, *The Shakespearean Puzzle—Endeavours after its solutions*, Sir P. C. Ray discussed at length the main problems in Shakespeare studies, from the life and career of the man to the authenticity and emendations of his text. Before tackling the problems he makes elaborate preliminary studies, like Elizabethan social conditions, history of the English stage, and the position of players and playwrights in Shakespeare's London. Such exhaustive background studies are in the right spirit of rational, scientific schools of Shakespeare criticism in the twentieth century.

(B) *Sri Aurabinda Ghosh :*

Aurabinda Ghosh's critical observations on Shakespeare, like his poetic creations, are not to be viewed as intellectual exercises of a scholarly mind trained in the best tradition of English classical education. Nor are these platitudinous expositions of the master works of Shakespeare by an Indian teacher in the hey day of admiration of English literature and culture in this country. They are rather to be accepted, not as Prof. Ghosh's writings, but as utterances of Sri Aurabinda, as an emanation of his soul consciousness in Shakespeare's wonder world, as a facet of his total spiritual realization of Life Divine. Such a view is corroborated by the fact that Aurabinda Ghosh's Shakespeare criticism came not in that period of his career when he had actually been a teacher, but much later when he was known to the world as a philosopher and seen, as a soul of rarest religious experience.

Perhaps the teacher's tone of studying an author rationally and in historical perspective may still be detected in his Shakespeare criticism. He regards Shakespeare as the supreme expression of the Renaissance spirit. Shakespeare is looked upon as the embodiment of the energy, passion

and wonder of life that thrilled Elizabethan England. Such a conception of Shakespeare is not in any way 'belittling the genius of Shakespeare as a creative artist'; it is rather a correct interpretation of the literary figure in the true perspective of national life and spirit of the age.

At the same time such literary criticism just illustrates Sri Aurobinda's "characteristic way of elucidating the phenomenal world in the light of nomenal spirit" that is the vital force behind all manifestations of life. This energy of the soul, surging in the national life of the age, found its proper vehicle and medium for communication in the voluble mind of a Shakespeare. The words as much catch fire from the soul that has realization as they receive illumination from the mind that can see. Here is a specimen :

"It bestows on the nation a new English speech, rich in capacity, gifted with an extraordinary poetic intensity and wealth and copiousness, but full also of the disorder and excess of new formation. A drama exultant in action and character, passion and incident and movement, a lyric and romantic poetry of marvellous sweetness, richness and force, are its ripe fruits. Here the two sides of the national mind throw themselves out for the first time with a full energy, but within the limits of a vital, sensuous imaginative mould, the dominant in its pure poetry, the other ordinarily in its drama, but both in Shakespeare welded into a supreme phenomenon of poetic and dramatic genius. It is on the whole the greatest age of utterance,—though not of highest spirit and aim,—of the genius of English poetry."

But it is the distinct voice of the prophet of Life Divine that we hear when Sri Aurobinda recognizes clearly the operation of the eternal creative force in Shakespeare's drama :

"It is the impulse towards an utterance of the creative life, of the life power within, which drives towards dramatic form and acts with such an unexampled power in Shakespeare."

And he declared in unmistakable terms that the Life Force has worked through the imaginative creation of Shakespeare's magic world :

"All Shakespeare's powers and limitations.....arise from the force that moves him to poetic utterance.... a great vital creator.... intensely a seer of life. His art itself is life arranging its forms in its own surge.....His way indeed is not so much the poet himself thinking about life, as life thinking itself out in him through many mouths, in many moods and moments. His development of human character has a sovereign force within its bounds, but it is the soul of the human being as seen through outward character, passion, action, the life-soul.....His is not a drama of mere external life. This is not..... the seer and creator of gross forms,

but.....the luminous mind of dreams looking through those forms to see his own images behind them.....His power of vision has created a Shakespearean world of his own, and it is, inspite of its realistic elements, a romantic world in a very true sense of the word,...world of the wonder and free power of life and not of its mere external realities, where what is here dulled and hampered finds a greater, enlarged and intense breath of living, an ultranatural play of beauty, curiosity and amplitude."

After Sri Aurabinda, in the glorious epoch of criticism as of creation in Bengali literature in the twentieth century, Mohitlal Majumdar, the celebrated poet-critic, on many occasions pointed to Shakespeare's absorbed, whole-hearted creation of beauty and his diving into the inner depths of the human mind and heart as the highest ideal of the literary art.

## XII. *Advanced Shakespeare studies in recent times :*

### (A) *Indian Researches and Editions :*

In Shakespearean scholarship the alumni of the University of Calcutta, the pioneer university in Bengal, and of its constituent colleges have not altogether lagged behind. Researches have been made in Shakespeare studies, on literary and linguistic as well as on social and historical sides. But these are mostly appreciative and interpretative than analytical in the scientific spirit. And Indian interpreters as a class are more concerned with the poetry and philosophy in Shakespeare's plays than with the dramatical, textual or other technical aspects of the master's creations.

Several good editions of the important plays of Shakespeare have been brought out, mostly for the purpose of helping the Indian students in the class room and in preparing for academic examinations. Though most of these are hack works commercially produced by rehashing standard English editions of Shakespeare with copious, elaborate notes on the text and characterization, a few of these productions evince remarkable analytical insight and beauty of expression. A work like Professor J. L. Banerjee's edition of *Macbeth* compares favourably with parallel English counterparts like the editions of Verity or Deighton.

Professor C. H. Tawney of the Presidency College, Calcutta, published an edition of *Richard III* in 1888, and Professor F. P. Rowe of the same institution brought out an edition of *The Tempest* (Cambridge, 1898). But the best editions came from Professor H. M. Percival of *Macbeth*, *As You Like It* (1910), *Merchant of Venice* (1912), and *Antony and Cleopatra*.

Of the editions brought out by Bengalees those of Professor J. L. Banerjee and Professor M. Sen are the most successful commercially and enjoy the widest popularity among students.

As early as 1879 Malone's edition of Shakespeare, brought out by Boswell (Jr.) in 1821, was reprinted in Calcutta by H. C. Mullick, showing evidently the early popularity of Shakespeare in Bengal.

(B) *Difficulties in Research :*

It is sometimes felt with regret that commensurate with the tradition of a quite high standard of Shakespeare teaching an equally glorious record of research work in Shakespeare studies has not been there. And the reason is obvious. The comparative paucity in the production of high standard research work on Shakespeare is due not so much to any inertia or inability as to certain initial handicaps inherent in the very circumstances of the case. Original investigations in Shakespeare, as for that matter in any field of English literature in general, in Indian universities involve practical difficulties almost insurmountable, such as non-availability of books, original and critical, and difficulty of access to source materials and authentic documents.

(C) *Papers and works on Shakespeare :*

In spite of inherent difficulties in carrying on Shakespearean researches in India, quite a good number of original works and research papers on Shakespeare have been produced here, and the inspiration does not seem to have dried up, but continues unabated, rather infused with the spirit of diversity of interests that characterizes modern Shakespeare criticism in England and America.

Here is a small list, in no way exhaustive, of works and papers on Shakespeare published by Bengalee writers in recent years. The author of most of these have been eminent teacher-critics. Among remarkable works on Shakespeare may be counted Professor P. K. Guha's *Tragic Relief*, Dr. M. M. Bhattacharya's *Courtesy in Shakespeare*, and Dr. S. C. Sengupta's *Shakespearean Comedy* and *The Whirlgig of Time* and Dr. S. Maitra's *Shakespeare's Comic Idea*.

While Dr. Bhattacharya's volume has a bearing on an important aspect of Elizabethan social life and manners, Prof. Guha dwells on a fundamental question of the art of tragedy. Dr. Sengupta is interested chiefly in the aesthetic and philosophical implications of Shakespeare's drama. His observations on Shakespeare's treatment of Time offer a unique interpretation of the universal and eternal aspects of Shakespeare's art, on the timelessness of Shakespeare's creations. Here is a specimen: "In *Henry IV, Part I* historical incidents happen in time.—But Falstaff is the symbol of agelessness: he stands outside the scope of Time....Time seems to have come to a stop."



Among numerous research papers on Shakespeare, contributed to periodicals, mention should be made of Dr. M. M. Bhattacharya's *Feudal Manners in Shakespeare* and *Evolution of Hamlet's Personality*, Prof. P. K. Guha's *The Inner Havoc in Shakespeare's Tragic Hero* and *On Two Problems in Shakespeare : Hamlet and Troilus and Cressida*, Prof. P. R. Sen's *Romantic Criticism of Shakespeare's Plays*, Prof. T. N. Sen's *Hamlet's Treatment of Ophelia in the Nunnery Scene*, Dr. S. K. Sen's *What Happens in Coriolanus*, Prof. D. N. Chatterjee's papers on Shakespeare in different countries on the continent, like *Shakespeare in Russia*, *French and German Critics of Shakespeare*, and comparisons with continental writers, like *Shakespeare and Voltaire*, *Shakespeare and Racine*.

In the quater-centenary year of Shakespeare's birth a big bunch of good Souvenir volumes came out. These contain substantial contributions to both studies of different aspects of Shakespeare's creation and historical surveys of Shakespeare studies and performances in Eastern India. Universities in Bengal, like those of Calcutta, Jadavpur, and Burdwan, brought out volumes in their respective campus. Some local associations, like the Jalpaiguri District Shakespeare quater-centenary committee, also put in their quota of such publications. The richest crop of critical and historical studies on Shakespeare lore was harvested in the commemoration volume published by central National body from *Mahajati Sadan* in Calcutta. Even an industrial concern like *Indian Oxygen* ventured producing an exquisite brochure on Shakespeare suited to the occasion.

# MEREDITH'S USE OF THIRD-PERSON DRAMATIZED NARRATION \*

---

AMITABHA SINHA

Although Meredith basically belongs to the omniscient author convention, he is frequently found to have adopted oblique narrative media. In this essay, I intend to examine his tendency towards refracting his narrative materials through *personae* or masks, whereby he dramatizes the "authors" of some of his novels. Through this method, he produces greater effects of authenticity and aesthetic distance, and provides more important channels for conveying meanings in the story, than could be done by the comparatively flat personality of the omniscient author. As the immediate context to the works where Meredith achieves full-scale dramatization of the author, I shall first discuss his edging towards a *persona*, sort of a half-way house between the shadowy omniscient author and the fully dramatized narrator.<sup>1</sup>

## II

As my first instance I shall take up *Vittoria* ( 1866 ). At first the dramatization is noticed in course of the description of the Italian patriots on Monte Motterone ( ch. II ), where certain lines appearing within brackets clearly indicate that, disembodied as he is, the narrator's identity is clearly different from that of the author ( p. 12 ). According to these lines, for all his praise of the Italians, the narrator "is not a partisan", and would be equable to "all", which implicitly includes the Austrians as well. As a matter of fact, his praise of the Italians, it is indicated, is mainly due to their noble humanity and not to their politics—there is a hint that the narrator may at times even disapprove of their political "means" and "ultimate views".<sup>2</sup> The function of this dramatization is seen in the way it affects our reading of the story. By accepting this impartial, humane character of the narrator, we travel with the story, so that we are prevented from getting unduly biased on behalf of the Italians, and have a clear, objective vision of the clash and interaction of human motives.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, the narrator is dramatized as a past witness of the events he is telling of. This is brought out through his "I" in the commentary made in course of

---

\* All textual references in this essay are to the *Memorial Edition* of Meredith's works in 27 volumes, London : Constable, 1910-11.

the narration of Vittoria's singing of the song at La Scala, which had been set to music by Rocco ( p. 240 ). Here he makes himself out as one who had been present in the auditorium like the characters of the story, and is "now" reporting his past experience to the reader. Sometimes his historical and political commentaries, given as by a knowledgeable, first-hand analyst of the contemporary situation,<sup>4</sup> add a further touch to the reporter's voice. To all this, if we add the fact of his presentation of himself as an Englishman ( e.g., p. 82 ), a more complete picture of his identity evolves. He is thus an English citizen who had visited war-ridden Italy as an interested person, and is now recounting his experiences to his English audience. This individuality looks more credible in view of the fact that in this respect he exactly resembles Merthyr and Wilfrid, who are characters in the story. This sympathetic, impartial foreigner's point of view from which the reader is to estimate the story, also provides the necessary focus to the narration.

My next instance is from *One of Our Conquerors* ( 1891 ). Here the omniscient narrator is implicitly dramatized as a contemporaneous, disembodied inhabitant of the fictional world. This is done more through suggestions than on concrete hints. Firstly, his direct knowledge of the date ( 1889 ) and history of the fictitious *The Rajah in London* ( p. 36 ) implies a contemporaneity between his historical time ( the novel's year of publication ) and that of the fictional world. Secondly, he stands as an observer of the action like some of the characters in the action. For example, in some of the scenes, his point of view suggests his standing as one of the crowd assembled there, but with a superior, detached vision.<sup>5</sup> This sense is also strengthened by the fact that, just like the band of observer-characters in the story who follow Victor's doings throughout,<sup>6</sup> he continues till the end as a consistent on-looker ; this is very well brought out in his first-person commentary on Victor's catastrophe ( p. 510 ), where he speaks as one of these characters who have congregated around Victor on the fateful night.<sup>7</sup> The sense that this on-looking narrator belongs to the novel's world is also suggested in the summary at the end ( p. 514 ), where his intermittent narration in the historic present tense shows a proximity and a certain link between the characters and himself. Thirdly, the dramatization is strengthened by the narrator's insistent, "authorial" employment of the first-person plural ( seldom "I" ) which is scattered too profusely to be illustrated. While some of these "we"s and "our"s denote his own subjectivity, quite a large number of them are used to suggest some of the characters' subjectivities as well.<sup>8</sup> The first person plural, thus, stands as a generalized image of the fictional community to which the narrator is suggested to be belonging through his use of such

expressions as "one of us" ( p. 34 ), "one of our mortal wounds" ( p. 389), and "one of our conquerors" ( title of the novel ).

The narrator of *Chloe* (1879),<sup>9</sup> my last instance, is more palpably dramatized. The dramatization is especially seen in chapter I (pp.191-94). Here the antecedents of the story—the events of the marriage between Susan and the Duke—are given, but not directly in the narrator's "voice" (the main story, as the narrator's account, starts from chapter II). The events are filtered through a "ballad", while the narrator stands as a reviewer. He summarizes the ballad, occasionally quoting it (pp. 193,194) ; he simultaneously comments on the periodicity of the events as well as on the ballad's intrinsic, literary merits.

For one thing, the antecedents, placed at two removes from us are clearly demarcated from the later story of *Chloe*. More important is that this "imaginary" function of the narrator automatically creates a fictional matrix for him (the ballad is fictional), different from that of the story. This sense is strengthened by the narrator's acquaintance with the opinions of two other imaginary persons : a "pictorial historian" (p.191) and a "moralist" (p.192). Another interesting point is that here he treats fictional events and characters (who re-appear in the main story) as parts of history—without giving a hint of his later narrative connexion with them. We see this particularly in his presentation of Beau Beamish as a historical character (pp.214-15).<sup>10</sup> Moreover, he compares the ballad and the beau's Memoirs as versions of "real" events (pp. 191-92), and somewhat self-consciously displays his knowledge of these facts in disagreement with the above-mentioned, pictorial historian ( *ibid* ). In this manner he integrates his historical time (itself fictionalized, as we saw before) into that of the story, and thereby acquires credibility as the subsequent story-teller.

The narrator's literary attitudes are another interesting aspect of dramatization. He emphatically upholds the ballad as an illustration of a genuine admiration of "Nature", contrasting it with the morbid and artificial practice of the contemporary poets who resort to mediaevalism and classicism. The image which we thus have of the narrator is obviously different from that of Meredith who was a friend of such poets and himself wrote such poems.<sup>11</sup> What is significant is that this romantic love of "Nature" serves an important, rhetorical purpose. It apparently creates a sympathy for the anonymous ballad-writer's "folk-song" view of Susan (this view is particularly illustrated in the quotations from the ballad), and tempts us into accepting her as a pastoral idol. But later the main story illustrates quite an opposite truth (chapters III-X), gradually revealing her to be of a vulgar and treacherous character (owing to her very dairy-maid origin). This produces an anti-climax to our previous, naive

admiration for Susan, and thereby contributes to the general sense of a shocking discovery at the end of the story (chapter X). The narrator's praise of the ballad is thus a deliberate device used for securing the necessary, ironical effect.

The above instances thus indicate Meredith's tendency to dramatize the "authors" of his stories and thereby bring out important meanings.<sup>13</sup> It is in the context of this tendency that the few works in which he created more explicitly and extensively dramatized narrators acquire their significance.

### III

These can be classified into two groups, according to the types of narrators they come from : (i) third person, and (ii) first person. I shall here deal with the former, represented by two novels, which more directly consummate the tendency we have examined above. These two are *Sandra Belloni* (1864) and *The Amazing Marriage* (1895), both of which dramatize the very act of story-telling. The more important one is *The Amazing Marriage*, but at first we must take a glance at *Sandra Belloni* which surely, though imperfectly, anticipates the technique of the other novel.

The technique is that of double-narrators. Both of them, being avowed story-tellers, stand beyond the world of the novel, but they belong to an independent, fictional world. The basis of this is a secondary fiction. A "Philosopher" has commissioned the author of the novel (henceforward referred to as the "author") to write it. There is a stipulation, however, that the "author" must allow the "Philosopher" to occasionally narrate the story and to analyze and expose the psychological springs behind the activities of the "sentimentalists" (pp.483-84). The "author" prefers to write popular novels of incidents and to manipulate the action according to his sweet will—being opposed to "lecturing" (*ibid.*). Naturally, he does not wish to conform, but he has to carry on, being under the other's thumb. Thus the "author" is a dramatized image and obviously not Meredith who had quite opposite inclinations.<sup>13</sup> The other narrator, the Philosopher, claims to have introduced a new narrative method : he says that, through his psychological probings, he achieves the illusion that the characters themselves—and not authorial manipulations—propel the story (p. 484, also p. 114 by implication).<sup>14</sup> Following their contract, the Philosopher's comments keep intruding from time to time into the narration, and vex the "author" (e.g., pp. 6, 62, 482-84, 527-28, 547, 589, including previous references). Apart from the creation of a general, fictional framework for the story, this narrative debate performs some other functions. While the

novel is full of commentaries, their intrusive edge is taken off to some extent by ascribing them to the Philosopher, shown as an "unreliable narrator"<sup>15</sup> through the "author"'s criticism (as in chapter II, also see p. 547). Secondly, the "author"'s preference for a fast-flowing story, as contrasted with the Philosopher's for an analytic one, re-inforce the presentation of sentimentalism, part of the subject-matter. The spirit of an acceptance of facts and opposition to probings, which inspires the theoretical attitude of the "author", highlights his attitude of accepting the sentimentalists as the creators of civilization without exploring their shallowness (pp.289-90). Moreover, this analogy between his theory of fiction and his view of sentimentalists is echoed by the sentimentalist Cornelia's preference for "fiction with a smooth surface" (as reflected in Sir Purcell's criticism, p. 65). Thirdly, the double-narrators stand as a metaphorical parallel to the double-interest of the novel, Emilia and the sentimentalists; the parallelism is very well brought out by the words of the "author", "my pet Emilia and Wilfrid his puppet" (p. 528). This sense of a parallelism is further heightened by the fact that the "author" hopes for release from the Philosopher's control (pp. 484, 560) just as Emilia struggles for her release from the world of sentimentalism. However, the technique is to some extent immature, mostly due to the inconsistencies in the narration by the "author". Sometimes a "philosophical" commentary appears, but without any mention of which narrator it comes from (in pp. 110-14.). Since the Philosopher is always mentioned before he says anything, one has to conclude that it must be from the "author"; yet he gives the commentary with a gusto which ill-suits his criticism of the Philosopher's methods.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the secondary fiction is not developed, and on the whole the Philosopher remains a shadow, giving his comments but never really narrating anything.

In *The Amazing Marriage*, this dramatization of alter ego story-telling is matured, improving on the imperfections of *Sandra Belloni*. One of the two narrators to whom the story is here entrusted is "Dame Gossip", the culmination of an archetypal character in Meredith's novels,<sup>17</sup> and the other is referred to as the "deuteragonist or the secondary person" (p.209), the former being dramatized explicitly and the latter implicitly. At first the dramatization is achieved through the fiction that the two narrators are reconstructing the story of the novel from the bundles of papers and documents containing the entire history of Fleetwood's and Carinthia's marriage (p. 25); in a way, this sense of refashioning "known" source-materials skirts round the effect of omniscience. Secondly, the illusion is given further shape in the fact that Dame Gossip, the custodian of the documents, has handed them over to the "deuteragonist"

according to a treaty ( e.g., pp. 25, 27, 30, 32 ) which allows her to recount some parts of the story, the rest being apportioned to the other. As each tells the story by turns, a tussle evolves about the story and their respective methods; this "fiction" runs parallel to the novel's story and dramatizes it. The comedy chiefly takes the form of a tug-of-war with the story. For, although a "treaty" is established, it is not very much regarded by Dame Gossip who is a voluble, over-enthusiastic, and belligerent woman and the other narrator has to curb her frequent "irruptions" with great difficulties.<sup>18</sup>

Sometimes, he is also forced to make concessions by summarizing in his own words what she would say.<sup>19</sup> In all this, Dame Gossip is shown to be an unreliable narrator, and the "deuteragonist", who has the lion's share in the story-telling and a steady control over it notwithstanding the former's interruptions, indicates the narrative norm.

The narrative controversy is carried on another, interesting level also; this is their polemics on fiction-writing, with reference to the story in hand. The views of the bumptious Dame Gossip, more frequent than those of her adversary, are as follows. A story must cater to the popular taste, present external events in a sensational manner, be a sentimental "romance" with "moralizations" ( sort of a Reade-Kingsley combine ), and gather a halo of rumour round itself; as for narrative manner, she prefers "animation", meaning thereby a smooth, straight-forward account, and wants to leave the readers to understand truths by themselves.<sup>20</sup> The other's views, a maturation of those of the Philosopher of *Sandra Belloni*, can be summed up by saying that he wants a new, psychological type of fiction which is required by the "growing activity of the head" in modern days, and by credibility and reason. In order to achieve such purposes, he would even sometimes halt the action with analyses; moreover, absolutely opposed to the "Dame" type of fiction, he hopes that the immature readers of his days will grow in their tastes along with the development of human nature in future and will appreciate the type of fiction he is ushering in.<sup>21</sup>

If this be the way in which a fictional reality is given to the narrators, the functions that they perform in the story are not less interesting. First, we shall look at their respective manners of telling the story, which, too, no doubt, are opposed to one another. Here also Dame Gossip stands conspicuous in her idiosyncrasies, contrasting with the objective "deuteragonist". True to her character as a gassy, gossipy woman,<sup>22</sup> she narrates in a colloquial, voluble style, standing more as a "teller" than as a writer. This is seen in her "foreknowledges" ( e.g., pp. 15, 20 ), in her old-gossip-type, wistful comments on old times ( e.g., pp. 8, 10, 14, 134 ), and in her

proud references to the sources of her story (mentioned below). Dame Gossip is made to narrate panoramically, and not "scenically" in this self-conscious style, as she surveys the rush of events in the long passages of time with emphasis on sensational incidents, quite true to her character. Thus, for example, she narrates the preliminary Kirby-episode in chapters I-III, which, giving the antecedents of the main action, requires a panoramic telling. From time to time in the course of the narration of the main story also, she gives panoramic accounts (as, e.g., in chapters XIII, XXIII). Then again, she reconstructs the story from her personal sources—her special authorities—, apart from the main bundle. Directly or indirectly, she frequently filters her narrative through these sources, and is quite proud of them in the manner of a self-styled historical researcher. Among them, the following deserve special mention: (a) Dr. Glossop, a stout antiquarian, (b) Rose Mackerell, a witness of the "Amazing Marriage", (c) the butler Queeney (referred to below), (d) ballads, which she quotes or summarizes, (e) her own papers and documents, and (f) some sources for the Kirby-episode.<sup>23</sup> This attitude serves a double purpose: it heightens the "pastness" of the materials, and it strengthens our impression of her feminine fondness for hearsay evidence. An extreme instance of how she builds an air of gossip through these can be illustrated from the narration of the Welsh "invasion" on Fleetwood: part of this comes as the narration of Queeney the butler who is being interviewed by Dr. Glossop, Dr. Glossop's findings in their turn being reported by Dame Gossip (pp. 355-57). Another occasional method of the Dame for creating the effect of gossip is through a curious identification with the collective, rumour-mongering point of view of contemporary socialities, made in the historic present tense (e.g., pp. 230-34).

There is not much to say on the "deuteragonist's" methods, because they are more or less the same as those in most of Meredith's novels. Apart from his occasional, forced adaptations of Gossopian narration (mentioned before), he is in the main a contemporaneous narrator, and is a rather reticent individual—unless compelled to otherwise by Dame Gossip.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, he frequently narrates from individual points of view (which the Dame never does), thus effectively bringing out the mental dramas principally of Fleetwood and Carinthia, as also of some other characters. He is not very much given to commentaries (despite his declared intention for lecturing), unless they are related to the exhibition of mental states, and even then they are sparse. He never uses Dame Gossip's personal "sources", for which he shows a distrust as unauthentic versions of facts,<sup>25</sup> and thereby his own objective method further heightens the sense of the other's unreliable narration.



This fictional opposition between Dame Gossip and the "deuteragonist" is functional in the novel's over-all technique. Firstly, their opposed methods are at bottom complementary to one another. In between them they maintain the continuity of narration. Thus, in chapter IV, the "deuteragonist" begins his narration of Carinthia's and Chillon's farewell to the old home (p. 33) directly after the Dame's narration of the Kirby-episode stops with Chillon's arrival (pp. 32-3). Moreover, this complementary narration is a clever way of dramatizing the necessary alternation of panoramic and contemporaneous narration that Meredith preferred, with emphasis on the latter (hence the larger scope given to the "deuteragonist"). Dramatized by her "intrusive" character, Dame Gossip's panoramic interruptions in the other's fairly scenic narration contribute to a regular rhythm of the two methods.<sup>26</sup> This rhythm also illuminates the subject-matter: The panoramas are presented in fantastic, heroic terms — which turn not only Kirby and Fanny, but also Fleetwood and Carinthia into big gallery-portraits.<sup>27</sup> This, coloured by the Dame's wistful comments (mentioned before) and supported by her source-narration, makes the panoramas larger-than-life, romance-like pictures of the past. Tempered by the other narrator's criticism, Dame Gossip's narration thus serves the important purpose of highlighting the mythical manner in which the story is partly conceived.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, the "deuteragonist's" impersonal method, as I have pointed out, gives us the spectacle of the deeper workings of mental states which govern the story. Thus, the rhythm of two narrative methods, mentioned just now, produces a peculiar "pulsation"<sup>29</sup> whereby our vision is shunted to and fro between the long-range and romantic, and the close-range and realistic views, so that a complete picture of the dual character of the novel—its combination of fantasy and psychology—is evolved.

Finally, the narrative comedy itself aids our understanding of the meaning of the novel as an analogue of the main story. The point of view which the Dame adopts of considering life a "mystery" in every matter (e.g., pp. 209, 295, 298, 396) intensifies our identification with the view of Fleetwood who thinks himself mysterious and inscrutable (e.g., p. 365). The "deuteragonist's" point of view, on the other hand, which seeks to probe beneath facts and would not know any mystery, is the metaphor of those characters of the story who develop towards self-knowledge and knowledge of others. Especially to be mentioned is Gower, who, like this narrator, is "philosophic", and who develops from his mistaken involvements (e.g., in chapters IX, XX) into wisdom, ultimately marrying Madge and being fully able to probe into Fleetwood's character.<sup>30</sup> Also mentionable is Kirby who, *in absentia*, is Fleetwood's antithesis like Gower

and who shows an active rationality as his "Maxims" frequently show.<sup>81</sup> Carinthia falls into this pattern, too, as she develops from her early, baffled understanding of Fleetwood (e.g., chapters XIV-XXII) to her enlightenment about him (chapter XXIX onwards). The tussle between the mystery-and-sensation-loving Dame Gossip and the philosophic "deuteragonist", therefore, parallels the theme of the story: the opposition between the sensual acceptance of surface-reality (Fleetwood) and the intellectual probe beneath it (Gower, Kirby, Carinthia). Thus, the dramatized fiction of the narrators is contrapuntally built into the novel's design; technique merges into structure, and structure in its turn serves the purpose of technique.<sup>82</sup>

Meredith's instinct for dramatized narration is also seen in his several experimentations in the first-person technique—these stand as a class apart and are beyond the scope of the present essay, deserving separate discussion. However, his *flair* was more for third person dramatization which is seen to be covering the entire range of his canon. As we have found, in the two novels considered above, Meredith remarkably dramatizes omniscient authorship itself, retaining its freedom on the one hand and achieving the effects of dramatized narration on the other. He fittingly achieved a satisfactory balance between the two ends in *The Amazing Marriage*, his last novel. Judging by the comparatively easy-going narrative methods of Victorian novels in general, his handling of this technique surely helps to see him as a significant experimenter in fictional craft.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. This need not be considered as paradoxical as it might superficially sound: see, e.g., W.Y. Tyndall, "Apology for Marlow", in *From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad*, ed. Robert C. Rathburn and Martin Steinmann, Jr., Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1958, p. 276, and Joseph Warren Beach, *The Twentieth Century Novel*, New York, D.Appleton-Century Inc., 1932, pp. 351-52; both critics notice the same kind of thing in Conrad's *The Nigger of Narcissus*.

2. This, surely, is distinguished from the image of Meredith in his *personal* life: the man who was definitely a "partisan" for the cause of Italy—seen in his passionate comments made on a later phase of the movement, as *Morning Post* correspondent (Memorial ed., XXIII, pp. 163-213), the man who asserted his friendship with Swinburne on the Italian issue (e.g., *Letters of George Meredith*, Collected and Edited by his son, London, Constable, 1912, pp. 188-89, 190), and wanted to live in Italy—(*ibid.*, p. 181).

3. The action, especially in chapter XXXVI onwards and also in the Epilogue, can be best understood in this light.

4. See, e.g., pp. 84, 86, 201, 460-61.

5. See, e.g., chapter I. esp. pp. 1-2: also pp. 84-5 and 230-32.

6. Like Colney, Simeon, Peridon, Priscilla, and Pempton, among others.

7. It is to be noticed that Dudley, a character, muses in the same vein on the catastrophe in the preceding paragraphs (p.36).

8. See, e.g., pp.17-8, 55-6, 269-70, 365-66, 448; also see the scenes mentioned in No. 5 above.

9. In pp. 191-266 of the *Memorial Edition*, XXI, which incorporates some other works.

10. Incidentally, the beau is modelled on Beau Nash of actual history; see S.M.Ellis, *George Meredith, His Life and Friends in Relation to His Work*, London, Grant Richards, 1920, p. 250.

11. The references are unmistakably to the Pre-Raphaelites and possibly to Tennyson, judging by the description of these poets.

12. Some more instances are as follows: the narrator in *The Tragic Comedians*, esp. pp.1-2, also pp.199-201 (the true-life basis of the story adds to the dramatization); the narrator in the "Prelude" of *The Egoist*, e.g., pp. 1,3, 5-6; also pp. 2-3, 3-4; the narrator in chapter I of *Diana*, pp. 1-15 *passim*, esp., pp. 1,6; also see *Beauchamp's Career*, pp. 1-6, 467, 629.

13. Clearly seen in some of his theorizations; see esp. *Beauchamp's Career*, pp. 38-9, 552,53.

14. It is interesting to notice that both thus claim the privileges of omniscience to a limited extent and both seek to curtail omniscience at the same time, although in opposed manners (see esp. pp. 483-84).

15. I borrow this term from Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, fourth impression, 1963, pp. 158-59.

16. See also p. 510 and chapter LIII, esp. p. 547, for some more prominent discrepancies in the views and methods of the author.

17. E.g. in *Richard Feverel*, there is mention of a Mrs. Deborrah Gossip circulating the rumour of Sir Austin looking for a bride for his son (p.143). Later on, in *Diana*, the author tells of Dame Gossip relating how and with whom Diana leaves England (p. 161.) In none of these novels, however, is Mistress or Dame Gossip a narrator as in this novel.

18. See, e.g., pp. 25, 27, 30, 32-3, 132-45, 269-72, 288.

19. E.g., chapters XXVI, XXVIII, XXXIV.

20. For these her preferences and dislikes, see, e.g., pp. 25, 30, 132-33, 139, 140-1, 209, 288, 357-58, 359-60, 367, 490, 510-11—mostly stated by herself and occasionally referred to by the "deuteragonist".

21. For the views of the "deuteragonist", see, e.g., pp. 17, 21, 27, 138.

22. Her feminine character is very explicitly dramatized; see, e.g., pp. 17, 21, 27, 138.

23. See, e.g., pp. 2-4, 10-3, 19-20, 25, 26, 30, 136, 141, 288-90, 352-53, 413, 480.

24. See e.g., pp. 263, 288.

25. See, e.g., pp. 288-90, 350, 352, 359-60, 367-69.

26. This is how the rhythm can be represented ("D" standing for the narration by the "deuteragonist" and "G" for that by Dame Gossip as also for "Gossipian" adaptations): G—chapters I-III; D—chapters IV-XXII; G—chapter XXIII; D—chapters XXIV-XXV; G—chapter XXVI; D—chapter XXVII; G—chapter XXVIII; D—chapters XXIX-XXXIII; G—chapter XXXIV; D—chapters XXXV-XLIV; G—chapters XLV (upto p. 480); D—chapters XLV (from p. 480)-XLVII (upto p. 507); G—chapter XLVII (p.507); there are some secondary, "Gossipian" breaks which I have not indicated.

27. Seen throughout chapters I-III, also in pp. 229-37, 269-71, 509-11.

28. E.g., Carinthia is partly an elemental mythic character as a daughter of the mountains (see esp. chapters IV-V); the same quality applies to her father, Kirby, too (see, e.g., pp. 29-30). And, after all, the clash of wills between Fleetwood and Carinthia is mythical in propensity—in its elemental character as well as in its magnitude.

29. I borrow the word from W.J. Harvey, "Chance and Design in *Bleak House*", *Dickens and the Twentieth Century*, ed. Gross and Pearson, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963, pp. 150-52.

30. See, e.g., chapters XX-XXXI, XL, XLVI.

31. See, e.g., pp. 137, 229, 310, 317, 339, 379, 476, 483, 486. It is interesting to note that the theory of fiction of the "deuteragonist" is coloured by its standard (p.359).

32. I do not agree with the point made by Gillian Beer in her otherwise able essay ("*The Amazing Marriage* : A Study in Contraries, *A Review of English Literature*, VII, 1966, 1, p. 97) that Dame Gossip is Carinthia's analogue and the other narrator is that of Fleetwood. The Dame's womanly identification with Carinthia in the early part of the novel (p.134) is a minor point that is lost in the major, later part. Such an analogy would apply to the technique of *Sandra Belloni* but is inadequate for explaining the more complex characterization in *The Amazing Marriage*.

## IVY COMPTON-BURNETT : A PERSPECTIVE

---

BIYOT K. TRIPATHY

Ivy Compton-Burnett may be described as the grand old dame of the second generation of Twentieth Century British novelists. By the thirties the novelists of the first generation were either dead, like Lawrence and Conrad, or had already written their best, like Joyce, Woolf ( *The Waves* came out in 1931 ), and Forster ( *A. Passage to India* was published in 1924 ); and the novelists of the second generation—Ivy Compton-Burnett, Graham Greene, Samuel Beckett, Henry Green, Elizabeth Bowen, C. P. Snow, Evelyn Waugh—were entering the field. Miss Compton-Burnett is an elder member of this group ; her first novel *Dolores* had come out in 1911, the same year that Lawrence's first novel was published. But while Lawrence's literary career was terminated in 1930, Compton-Burnett was beginning afresh after fourteen years of silence : her second novel *Pastors and Masters* came out in 1925. Since then she has written steadily and now has a tally of seventeen novels.<sup>1</sup> Born a Victorian she lived in a first floor Kensington apartment furnished in Victorian style. Preferring to write in long-hand, she never used a type-writer :

I write in longhand. My typist is very kind and reads my writing. I used at one time to destroy my manuscripts, but now you can sell the tiresome things. I have long bouts of not writing. That is why I take a fair time over a book. I do not write slowly or destroy much, but I have long spaces in which I do not write at all. After I finish a book I feel that all the virtue has gone out of me. <sup>2</sup>

Writing almost entirely in the dialogue-form,<sup>3</sup> she interprets life in terms of the Victorian family :

I put my time back in my books. I do not think people really know the time they are living in, particularly in this very mixed-up, changeable time, though in a way human life—the fundamental relationships—must always remain the same.<sup>4</sup>

It is not unnatural then to consider Miss Compton-Burnett a little old-fashioned. But one suspects that, despite the apparent restriction of the material, her novels are very much in the psychological present, reflecting all the complexity of modern life. It is gratifying that recent criticism has become increasingly aware of the depth and complexity of her novels.

The present paper intends to review the attitudes to Miss Compton-Burnett's novels with a view to exploring the possibilities of study in this field.

Although Ivy Compton-Burnett wrote for over forty years, and has evidently been read, she seems to have caught the attention of critics only in the fifties. Pamela Hansford Johnson's was the first full study of Compton-Burnett, though it was for the *British Book News*. Robert Liddell, four years later, wrote the second and fuller study of her works, and Baldanza is right in calling him the dean of Compton-Burnett critics.<sup>5</sup> Baldanza declares that his book is meant to be an introduction for the general reader who should take interest in one of the finest novelists of our time. One cannot help wondering why this interest has been evinced.

It has been observed that Compton-Burnett truthfully and boldly depicts Victorian life, while, at the same time, she attains universality by going to the very source of human action. She takes a family or a small community as her subject and studies the pattern of action and motivation. In her study of the family and the community she projects a pattern of social organization unique to her point of view, yet universal in its appeal because it approaches reality. The family—normally Victorian—is ruled by a strong-headed man, often designated by critics as a tyrant. His actions do sometimes become tyrannical because he insists on having his way, right or wrong. But to say that he is always and completely oppressive would be unjust. Duncan Edgeworth in *A House and Its Head* shows understanding and learns through experience. Horace, who in *Manservant and Maidservant* would torture his children callously learns by experience and tries to reform. The question that arises now is whether this truthful depiction of life in the family or in the small community is the end Compton-Burnett envisages. If so, she belongs to the realistic tradition of the novelists who are concerned with human action and its truthful depiction. Yet, when one examines the pages of her novels and finds the organizational pattern shifting and changing, motives and action drifting into a state of flux, and the language lifting the narrative to the heights of emotion, one cannot help feeling that she has created something more than Victorian life in England. One often feels that the family or the group presented in Compton-Burnett's novels is not merely the family as it is but a microcosm of society. In other words, in her novels the vast expanse of social organization has undergone photographic reduction into the family. The point is significant, for if the family is a replica of the society, the characters must be social types rather than individuals, the motivation a condensation of social motivation, and action representative rather than unique and individualized. Then the tyrants must be

seen as counterparts of the rulers in a country : king in a totalitarian set-up, business magnate in a capitalistic environment, or the Party in a communistic background. On the other hand, if we seek the tyrant's counterpart in the religious hierarchy, God would be the figure represented --a necessarily unjust God that is. It may be noted here that Henry Bently the "tyrant" of *Pastors and Masters* has the additional power of being a clergyman, uniting the temporal and the religious. The tyrannized children, as in *Manservant and Maidservant*, would then become the representative figures for the "havenots" who are oppressed. Going farther, into the domain of motivation, one has to face further difficulties. If life presented is a microcosm of society, then motivation must also be a derivative of social motivation rather than deriving from the peculiar constitution of the character. Horace's tyranny then ( in *Manservant and Maidservant* ), would have to be interpreted as the tyranny of the "haves" over the "havenots," of those who have power of wealth over those who do not have. Though the possibilities are inviting, such an interpretation may not stand up when stretched to its logical conclusion.

Liddell has suggested that Compton-Burnett probes the 'cob-web infested dark corridors' of the human mind. Referring to the action of Horace's children in permitting him to go to the broken bridge, Liddell upholds the psychological realism :

The happenings are dramatic but not at all improbable ; probably children contemplate or attempt patricide, matricide and fratricide very much more often than sentimental child-lovers would like to believe. Sometimes they achieve it—are all the "accidental homicides" committed by children really accidental ?<sup>6</sup>

Again :

Some of the worst things are hushed up...The darkest of all places are often not even suspected ; it is into these, the deepest oubliettes and dungeons of the family, that Miss Compton-Burnett flashes her lantern. "Who measured their depth ?" She has.<sup>7</sup>

Such an interpretation is not entirely fallacious, though Liddell's conclusion as to psychological verisimilitude is based on the premise of man being naturally evil, a point of view which has led writers like Lawrence to violent reaction. Liddell's Freudian bias is evident. Yet discounting the generalization and exaggeration, the action of the children appears psychologically plausible in the context. But one feels that Compton-Burnett's entire purpose is not merely to hold a lantern to the dark recesses of the mind. Such an interpretation is, moreover, opposed to the former point of view in that, there, characters were taken to be representational, whereas here the characters and their motives are idiosyncratic.

Karl takes the stand that Compton-Burnett is a family chronicler who has "taken the Victorian family novel and turned it inside out, revealing the dirt behind the romantic exterior."<sup>8</sup> He also holds that the law of the jungle is operative in her novels.<sup>9</sup> Angus Wilson, on the other hand, takes the contrary point of view that in Compton-Burnett's novels the surface-themes can be transcended and in the final analysis her novels will be found to deal with unconscious themes, conflicts and even symbols.<sup>10</sup> He does not, however clarify whether he implies that the action and motivation can be traced to archetypes of a sort of racial unconscious that was suggested by Jung. It is not difficult to see from the complexity of interpretations the nature of the material in Compton-Burnett's novels.

In order to understand her works better, attempts have been made to place her in a tradition. Elizabeth Bowen places her in the Victorian tradition because Compton-Burnett works though the family as the basic unit of society as it was in the Victorian novel. She says, "Miss Compton-Burnett is not merely copying but actually continuing the Victorian novel."<sup>11</sup> Another suggestion comes from Newby and has been supported by Liddell. Newby suggests that Compton-Burnett conceives her characters and situations on such a scale that they are like the characters and situations of Greek drama.<sup>12</sup> Nathalie Sarraute has related the modern novel to the Dostoevskian and Kafkaesque traditions.<sup>13</sup> While the one concerns itself with the depiction of life "in the isolation" with a psychological bias, the other studies characters "in situation," exploring the complexities of life through man's involvement in situations. One is tempted to place Compton-Burnett in the latter tradition. The numerous possibilities here also are bewildering; and it testifies to the complexity and diversity of the elements present in her novels.

It is probably nobody's fault that we try to categorize the material in order to understand it, such being the necessity of human understanding. Occasionally, however, it may be fruitful to recognize the complexity of the material fully before making a valid reduction into categories. In the novels of Compton-Burnett, in spite of the narrow field surveyed, life is not studied as a fixity. The family here is not a stratified unit where individuals have fixed functions. Here, things appear to be in perpetual motion. In the constant action, reaction, and impact among characters, attitudes keep changing until things appear to be in a state of flux. Even motives grow, change, and disappear. There is historicity but there is change; the change in the attitude of the people towards the action of the leading characters is kaleidoscopic. The unit surveyed by Compton-Burnett is so small that it creates the impression of a solid, static unit, but



the movements inside are so compelling that they cannot be ignored. The resultant juxtaposition of staticity and change may extend itself to a juxtaposition of form and content. One may find, on examining the nature of the movement implied in her novels, not more oscillation, nor progression in time, but an organizational movement in depth, not necessarily following the time-pattern : a progressive change of the gestalt pattern or organization in a different dimension, as it were, which may ultimately be spatial rather than psychological.<sup>14</sup> The possibilities of research in this field are inviting and initiative is not likely to go unrewarded.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 *Dolores* (1911), *Pastors and Masters* (1925), *Brothers and Sisters* (1929), *Men and Wives* (1931), *More Women Than Men* (1933), *A House and Its Head* (1935), *Daughters and Sons* (1937), *A Family and a Fortune* (1939), *Parents and Children* (1941), *Elders and Betters* (1944), *Manservant and Maidservant* (1947), *Two Worlds and Their Ways* (1949), *Darkness and Day* (1951), *The Present and the Past* (1953), *Mother and Sons* (1955), *A Father and His Fate* (1957), *A Heritage and Its History* (1959).

2. W. J. Weatherby, "Tea at Four," *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, May 17, 1962, p. 11.

3. *Ibid*, "I find dialogue easy to write and I seem to think in conversation."

4. *Ibid*

5. Frank Baldanza, *Ivy Compton-Burnett*. New York: Alfred A. Knoff (1964), p. 137.

6. Robert Liddell, *The Novels of Ivy Compton-Burnett*. London: Victor Gollancz (1955), p. 41-42.

7. *Ibid*. p. 50

8. Frederick R. Karl, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary English Novel*. London: Thames and Hudson (1963-1964), p. 203

9. *Ibid* p. 201

10. "Ivy Compton-Burnett," *The London Magazine*, II, July (1955), pp. 64-70

11. *Collected Impressions*, New York: Alfred A. Knoff (1950), p. 89

12. P. H. Newby, *The Novel 1945-50*. London: Longman-Green (1951), p. 29

13. *The Age of Suspicion: Essays on the Novel*. Translated by Maria Jolas. New York: George Braziller (1963), p. 11

14. Cf. H. Wildon Carr, "'Time' and 'history' in Contemporary Philosophy, with Special Reference to Bergson and Croce," *Proceedings of the British Academy* (1917-18), p. 336. Carr describes spatial time and differentiates it, from "true duration" which is non quantitative, psychological in nature, and is existence itself.

# MODERN ASSESSMENT OF THE ROMANTIC POETS : A STUDY IN THE WHIRLIGIG OF TASTE

---

P. K. SAXENA

It could be said, without fear of contradiction, that the expansive spirit of Romanticism was dominant in English literature roughly from the end of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the first world war. In fact some scholars are of the opinion that there are romantic tendencies even in modern writers and that Romantic poetry touches contemporary literature at many vital points. The origin of the movement is usually fixed in 1798, the year of publication of the 'Lyrical Ballads', though Bowra would rather have it at 1789, the year of Blake's 'Songs of Innocence'. So far so good, but as soon as one wishes to proceed further one gets bogged into difficulties.

In this life of ours and in the world we inhabit there are realities too complex and sometimes too mysterious to be neatly summed up in a definition. A great deal of exposition and explication are required to set them forth even approximately. Romanticism is an objective and historical reality of this kind, and it has baffled scholars and critics who have been trying for over a century now to compress its essence into a generally acceptable definition without much success. Indeed the word has been so tossed about and battered out of shape that, as Lucas would have it, "the heart sinks at the very name of it". "The reader", he goes on to say, "who gnaws his way through the 11396 books on Romanticism (God knows where he got that number, but for all we know it may be true, for there is really no end to the making of books) begins to feel cured of Romance for life." The attempt or hope to find a definition that would readily unlock the mystery of Romanticism is likely to remain frustrate. There are literally hundreds of definition of this protean word. A good many of these have been collected by Bernbaum in his 'Guide Through the Romantic Movement' and by Lucas in 'The Decline and Fall of the Romantic Ideal' and 'Literature and Psychology'. What explanations have we not heard? Romanticism is the resurgence of medievalism; in contrast to health and classicism it is sickness; it can reveal the infinite,

in the direction of which it tends : it is the manifestation of free will as against necessity ; it is the rediscovery of nature. and at the same time a kind of religious pantheism ; it is the renaissance of wonder ; a kind of mysticism and transcendentalism which yet attempts to grapple with the phenomenon of perception, and to discover the truths hiding behind it. It is indeed hard to see how any of these conceptions can cover Romanticism. Some contradict each other, some are obviously hostile and unfair to Romanticism, some are only inapplicable to others. A logician and historian of ideas, A. C. Lovejoy, who has written extensively on the subject, analysing many varieties of Romanticism, specially in one of his articles entitled 'On the Discrimination of Romanticism'<sup>1</sup> ends up by denying any real unity among them. "There are many Romanticisms", he says, and the so called 'romantic' ideas are "heterogeneous, logically independent and sometimes essentially antithetic....." This is, it must be said, rather an extreme opinion, but nonetheless sufficiently illustrative of the confusion just mentioned. The romantic writers themselves were by no means in absolute agreement over matter of theory and practice and nearly all at some time uttered derogatory opinion about the views and writings of some of the others. So much in respect of a definition of Romanticism. Amusingly enough a similar chaotic situation confronts us if we try the intriguing game of locating the chief originator of the movement. Some of the suggested names are, Joseph Warton, the 18th century critic of Pope ( by Gosse ) Rousseau ( by Babbitt ) because he is alleged to advocate an extreme form of naturalism, primitivism and democracy ; Kant ( by Santayana and Russell ) because of his transcendental idealism ; Mlle de Scudery ( by Ker ) because of her heroic romances ; Bacon ( by Babbitt ) because of his practical and anti-Aristotelian tendency : St. Paul ( by Grierson ) because of his introduction of Christian mysticism into Greek civilization ; Christ ( by Heine, who says, "Romanticism is a passion flower blooming from the blood of Christ" ) ; the serpent in the garden of Eden ( by Whibley ) because he was the first inciter to rebellion. The muddle is hopeless, and the unlikelihood that the various personalities should have originated one and the same movement is too obvious to need demonstration. In the search for a so-called father as in that for a formula one comes up against an impasse.

However, inability to define, as we all know, is no proof of the unreality of a thing. Despite Jestling Pilate we are aware of truth as a vitally important concept. Such also are the concepts of love, democracy and Christianity which though not reducible to the brevity of a dictionary definition are nonetheless realities which can be set forth in ampler form of discourse. Despite these contradictions and confusions the Romantics

have long been thought of as a school of writers united by common tendencies. The unity amid the variety of romantic work has been felt by generations of readers with literary and imaginative sensibilities. Surface differences notwithstanding there was a basic similarity among their views and attitudes towards God, Man and Nature.

Since we are mainly concerned with the modern reputation of the Romantics, we shall only briefly mention assesment of their work in the nineteenth century as a link with the twentieth. It is obvious that knowledge and understanding of the Romantic movement in all its complexity and interrelations is incomparably better today than it was at the turn of the last century. Sixty or seventy years ago it was extremely difficult to obtain accurate or even complete editions of the work and letters of many important romantic writers. As such assessment of them could only be partial and limited. The movement was taken to be little more than a change in poetic diction and verse forms and an expression of love for nature and the common man. Its friends and admirers went into ecstasies over the style and tone of some of the poets and studies were devoted mainly to technique. Their profound themes, imaginative intuition and concern with various problems was usually lost on those devotees. The materialists who distrusted their messages and intimations were their chief enemies. Taine, in his popular 'History of English Literature' ( 1863, Translated 1871 ); appreciated only Byron and dismissed the others. George Brandes in his 'Main Currents in 19th. Century Literature' ( 1871, translated 1901 ) likewise ran down Wordsworth and Coleridge and appreciated Shelley only because he was a social rebel ( Brandes himself was a political radical ). Courthope whose view point was narrowly classical, in his 'History of English Poetry' ( Vols. V & VI, 1903-5 ) described the movement as frustrate and deleterious.

As we advance into the twentieth century we are simply bewildered and dazed by the number and variety of studies of different aspects of the Romantic Movement. There is hardly a year that goes by without bringing forth at least three or four full length studies of either the Romantic Movement or its poets. And there are articles by hundreds published in the learned journals from the U. S. A, and the U. K. There are two quarterlies in the U. S. A.—'Studies in Romanticism' from Boston and 'Keats-Shelley Journal' from Harvard University—wholly devoted to romantic work, and then we have the 'Keats Shelley Bulletin' from the U. K.

The Neo-humanists and the New Critics are the main detractors of Romanticism, though, strangely enough, no critic in either group has ever cared to devote an entire book to the Ramantic Movement or even to one

of the great English romantic poets. Their vigorous and persistent attacks are found in short essays or occasional passages in books devoted to other subjects.

The Neo-humanists condemned Romanticism for its all-embracing naturalism which huddled together nature, man and God in an indiscriminate mass. Paul Elmer More (1864-1937), teacher of Sanskrit and Classics at Harvard, in 'The Drift of Romanticism' <sup>9</sup> called Romanticism "the illusion of beholding the infinite within the stream of nature itself, instead of apart from that stream." This is the key-charge repeated by the moral crusador Irving Babbitt (1865-1933) in his influential 'Rousseau and Romanticism' (1919). He opposed Romanticism which, he felt, had replaced the religious and classical with decadent humanitarianism. The worst characteristics of Romanticism, according to him, was the glorification of an uncritical and irresponsible aesthetic imagination, uncontrolled by reason or good sense, and thus encouraging man's impulsive egotism and wishful illusions. He felt that the gap and the conflict between the natural and the human was an unbridgeable one which the romantics in vain attempted to overcome.

A strong refutation of the humanist position came from C. H. Herford in his 'Romanticism and the Modern World' (Essays and Studies, English Association, (1922). Fausset in his 'The Proving of Psyche' (1929) persuasively argues the romantic case in the essay entitled 'The New Humanism Disputed'. J. W. Beach in his 'Romantic View of Poetry' (1944) rejects humanism as a moral straitjacket, though he is by no means enamoured of the Romantics and in turn rejects their theory that communion with nature is helpful to man. It may not be wrong to say that humanists were, in general, led away by their preoccupation with ethics.

The New Critics are, on the whole, sounder critics in view of the fact that they keep far more closely to literary matters and texts. As mentioned earlier their opinions about Romanticism and romantic poetry are scattered in writings on various topics. Although in moments of generosity and condescension the New Critics have praised a few romantic works, their philosophy and literary tastes are essentially hostile to Romanticism. The reasons are not far to seek. The New Critics speak for a generation that is 'contention tossed' and has suffered loss of values being torn by two devastating wars. Skepticism rules most thinking minds and the human situation appears hopelessly perplexing. In fact English and American literatures, in general, of the past half century have gone through the 'wasteland' phase and still take a disillusioned and dismal view of life, though occasionally one notices a strong urge on the writer's part to free himself from the surrounding despair. Romantic poets envisioned the

universe as somewhat different. The predominant note of romantic poetry is its assertion of concord, of the "one life within us and abroad", of

The feeling of life endless, the great thought

By which we live, Infinity and God. (Wordsworth)

or of man as "free, uncircumscribed.....the king over himself ; just, gentle, wise". The predominant note of modern poetry, by way of contrast, "is its sense of conflict or tension .....and the universal vision has given way to image of disintegration".<sup>3</sup> The New Critics assert that romantic literature, as a whole, is too emotional, too soft—not dry, hard, classical—too hopeful that the good in man's nature may overcome the evil, too credulous about the possible harmony in the apparent discords of the universe and, above all, too sure that Imagination cooperating with reason could reveal the reality and the truth. In addition, for the New Critics, the best poetry and literature stresses everything that is not romantic—the hard-headed, intellectual (with a lot of 'cerebration') the heterogeneous, the paradoxical, the ironical, the witty, the ambiguous and so on. Their main targets of attack are Shelley and, to a certain extent, Wordsworth. While indubitably influenced by Coleridge they seem to be lukewarm about him. Following Arnold's lead that Byron was 'empty of matter' they disregard him. Eliot has called his mind uninteresting and with 'a defective sensibility'. Keats has had much better and consistent luck with the critics, both old and new.

The first shot was fired by T. E. Hulme with his notoriously frank statement "I object even to the best romantics" in his 'Romanticism and Classicism' (Speculations, 1924) According to him they are constantly whining about something or the other. They are always taking flights to the region of the 'infinite' which is their key-word. What happens in Romanticism, he thinks, is that "you do not believe in a God, so you begin to believe that man is God. You do not believe in heaven, so you begin to believe in heaven on earth". Associating it with the French Revolution and the beginning of a modern world for which he had a profound distaste he equated Romanticism with political liberalism and false optimism about human nature. Murray Krieger, however, in his 'The New Apologists For Poetry' (1956) has pointed out some romantic traits in Hulme himself.

T. S. Eliot, the doyen of modern criticism, following in the wake of Hulme attacked the Romantics. With his high assessment of the Metaphysicals one could scarcely expect him to have any favourable opinion of them, sadly wanting as they are in his ideal of the fusion of thought and feeling. He is especially harsh on Shelley. In an essay in 'The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism' (1933) though not denying Shelley poetic gifts of a high order he says, "I find his ideas repellant and

that hampers my enjoyment of the poems in which they occur", and further on, "the man was humourless, pedantic, self-centred, and sometimes almost a blackguard". Fortunately for Shelley, though perhaps not quite fortunately for himself, Eliot had a way of revising his opinions. In his brief preface to Leon Vivante's *'English Poetry and Its Contributions to the Knowledge of a Creative Principle'* (1950) Eliot says "He (Vivante) has brought me to a new and more sympathetic appreciation of the poet..... Signor Vivante finds Shelley's poetic thought.....in recurrent insights which turn up again and again. These insights are what might be called the proper thinking of Shelley's poetry."<sup>4</sup> Also his Anglo-Catholicism in religion led him to distrust romantic poetry as an artistic expression of protestant non-conformity, a foolish reliance on an 'inner voice'. Edmund Wilson in his *'Axle's Castle'* (1931) has shown how, influenced by the French Symbolists, Eliot re-acted against what seemed to him the confusion, imprecision and vagueness of romantic verse.

William Empson, thoroughly imbued with the ideas of Richards, under whom he studied at Cambridge, holds ambiguity, in his *'Seven Types of Ambiguity'* (1930), as the distinguishing feature of the language of poetry and finds the Romantics escapists or childish.

The attitude is shared by America's leading New Critics John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate and Cleanth Brooks. In *'The World's Body'* (1938) Ransom condemns Romantic poetry as a 'Platonic' poetry which pretends to be solid and sensuous, but is actually an allegory of abstract ideas presented in images. Tate, takes a similar position in *'Reason and Madness'* (1941) wherein he charges Coleridge with being the source of all erroneous modern criticism. He has made a close analysis and given high praise to Keats's *'Ode to a Nightingale'* in *'The Man of Letters in the Modern World'* (1936). Cleanth Brooks in his *'Modern Poetry and the Tradition'* (1936) and the *'Well Wrought Urn'* (1947) though employing certain romantic criterion finds such romantic poetry sentimental and excessively pure. This is as much as one can expect from writers who regard metaphysical poetry as the norm.

Another American specialist in Romanticism is Howie N. Fairchild who has consistently viewed Romanticism with alarm. He blames its individualism for many current difficulties in *'The Romantic Quest'* (1931) *'The Noble Savage'* (1938) and his monumental *'Religious Trends in English Poetry'*. In a recent symposium in reappraisal on *'The Major English Romantic Poets'*, Fairchild has an essay on *'Romanticism: Devils' Advocate'*, wherein he finds the "the taproot of Romanticism in man's desire to feel independently good, strong, wise and creative, his thirst of boundless expansion of being in a universe which echoes back to him his

assertion of self-sufficient power." "To be romantic", he says, "is to reject that finitude which is inherent in all pattern," and further "withdrawing deeper and deeper into the stronghold of his inward uniqueness, the romantic widens the gap between himself and other men and between life and art." Fairchild is an acute and deep scholar; one may question, however, whether importing religious standards into critical evaluation is not fraught with special danger.

Two other adversaries of Romanticism may here be mentioned who are neither humanists nor New Critics. Mario Praz in 'The Romantic Agony' (1931 : Translated 1933) has amassed exotic, erotic, satanic and pathological excesses attributable to the Romantic movement in Europe, and drives us to the conclusion that Romanticism leads to the perverse and the distorted. Lucas in 'The Decline and Fall of the Romantic Ideal' (1936) is on the whole anti-romantic and anti-Coleridge. He concentrates on the emotional and sensational extremes of the movement calling them "The Crocodiles of the Unconscious."

It would be very unfair to omit Leavis from this account, though it is now the fashion to denigrate him. His 'Revaluations' (1936) is a somewhat perplexing book, but one that a student of Romanticism would do well to read carefully. He admires aesthetic and moral sensibility but only when it is combined with critical intelligence. He underestimates Coleridge and Shelley, but appreciates Wordsworth and specially Keats.

Defenders of Romanticism did not, of course, lag behind, though for obvious reasons, their work strikes one as less spectacular than that of the detractors and the aggressors. They have, in general, tried to argue the adequacy of Romanticism as a theory of artistic creation, and occasionally countered the arguments of hostile critics against particular authors in well reasoned-out essays.

D. G. James in 'Skepticism and Poetry' (1937) asserts the power and scope of Romantic imagination, and in his 'The Romantic Comedy' (1948) gives us penetrating studies of the major Romantics. C. S. Lewis, in spite of his strong predilections in another direction defended Romanticism in 'Rehabilitations' (1939) against the prejudiced revaluations of Leavis and Eliot, specially in his report entitled 'Shelley, Dryden and Mr. Eliot'. Another notable defence of Shelley against the onslaughts of the New Critics was made by Pottle in his essay 'The Case Against Shelley' (1952). C. M. Bowra has offered a sympathetic interpretation of the Romantic movement and its poets in 'The Romantic Imagination' (1949). Wilson Knight, a great Byron enthusiast, provides a series of eloquent and appreciative interpretations of Romantic poetry in his 'Starlit Dome' (1949). His criticism, though very suggestive, is occasionally vitiated by his exces-



sive enthusiasm, as in the case of Byron. A book from a rather unexpected quarter, and so sometimes unduly neglected, is 'The Poet's Defence' (1939) by a Cambridge science professor, J. Brownowski. He thinks that the Romantics' confidence in the value of poetry has been lost today because faith in transcendental ideas has faded away.

Two very able and staunch supporters of Romanticism in the U. S. A. are Bernbaum and R. H. Fogle. Apart from many other essays Bernbaum's 'Guide Through the Romantic Movement' (1930) is a real guide through the mazes of the bewildering amount of scholarship devoted to the movement in the first half of this century. Fogle in his 'The Imagery of Keats and Shelley' (1949) combats convincingly the views of Hulme, Eliot, Leavis, Ransome, Tate and Brooks in defence of Romanticism in general and of Shelley in particular.

Among recent studies by way of defence and appreciation may be mentioned Read's 'The True Voice of Feeling' (1953) which traces Romantic influence of Freudianism, Surrealism etc.

Two recent volumes, not by single authors but anthologies, which must be carefully studied are 'The English Romantic Poets: A Review of Research' edited by T. M. Roysor (1956, now revised) and 'The Major English Romantic Poets: A Symposium in Reappraisal' edited by Thorpe, Baker and Weaver (1957). The former is, as its title indicate, a history, of scholarship of the Romantic movement and its five major poets. The latter volume is a compilation of answers given by twenty leading scholars to a series of questions on the Romantics. It is a frank evaluation, in terms of present day standards, of the Romantic period as a whole and each of its five leading poets. The writers furnish a considerable range of view, which is rendered the more interesting as not all of them are friendly to the Romantics; among the contributors are Fairchild, R. D. Havens and Cleanth Brooks.

The fact that Romanticism has been attacked and defended vigorously for the last half century or more is proof enough of its continuing vitality. Students of the movement have been emphasising the positive qualities of its achievement. Some of the terms used by scholars like Lovejoy, Wellek, D. G. James, Bowra are 'dynamism', 'organicism', 'dynamic organicism', 'organic vitalism'—all expressive of vitality. The truths of the Romantic faith are discerned chiefly through the imagination, and it is chiefly to imagination that they appeal for acceptance. The Romantic believes in 'the evidence of the unseen'. This does not, as some may imagine, run counter to modern scientific thinking, which does not deny the possibility that such visions may be revelatory. Says Einstein :

The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is

the source of all fine art and science. He to whom the emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand wrapped in awe is as good as dead ; his eyes are closed. To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty, which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms, this feeling is at the centre of true religiousness ;..... It is enough for me to contemplate the mystery of conscious life perpetuating itself through all eternity, to reflect like the marvellous structure of the universe we can dimly perceive, and to try humbly to comprehend even an infinitesimal part of the intelligence manifested in Nature.”<sup>6</sup>

That the Romantic optimism and belief in immense possibilities, carped at by Hulme and others, was not facile, cheap and tawdry is borne out by Julian Huxley who says, “Past human history represents but the tiniest portion of the time man has before him.....The potentialities of progress which are revealed once his eyes have opened to the evolutionary vista, are unlimited.....at last we have an optimistic instead of a pessimistic theory of this world and our life upon it”.<sup>7</sup>

We can do no better than conclude with a quotation from Bowra who says, “If a society has ever existed which is completely content with what it has, and asks for nothing else, it would not need such comfort as the Romantics have to offer. But to all who are dissatisfied with a current order or a conventional scheme of things, this spirit brings not an anodyne but an inspiration. From discontent it moves to a vision of a sublime state in which the temporal without losing its individuality, is related to the timeless, and the many defects of the given world are seen to be irrelevant and insignificant in comparison with the mysteries which enclose it.”<sup>8</sup>

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Originally published in the PMLA 1924, and now available in the ‘Modern Essays in Criticism’ volume on the Romantic Poets.

2. Shelburne Essays VIII, 1913.

3. ‘The Romantic Assertion’ by R. A. Foakes, p. 15.

4. A similar kind of change took place in his opinion of Milton. The first Milton essay was written in 1936 and the subsequent one in 1947.

5. In a statement, printed in an issue of the TLS in 1949, David Daiches excellently summed up the work of the New Critics and their dogmatic disapproval of the Romantic poetry when he said, “The school which maintains that the essence of poetry is paradox and that Keats must be proved paradoxical before he can be shown to be a great poet is the ascendant critical school in the U. S. today.”

6. ‘I Believe’, 1940.

7. Ibid.

8. ‘The Romantic Imagination, p. 292.

---

*In Memoriam*

EDWARD MORGAN FORSTER

1 January 1880 — 7 June 1970

---

1